

NEW EAGLE SERIES No.1091

LOVE AT THE LOOM

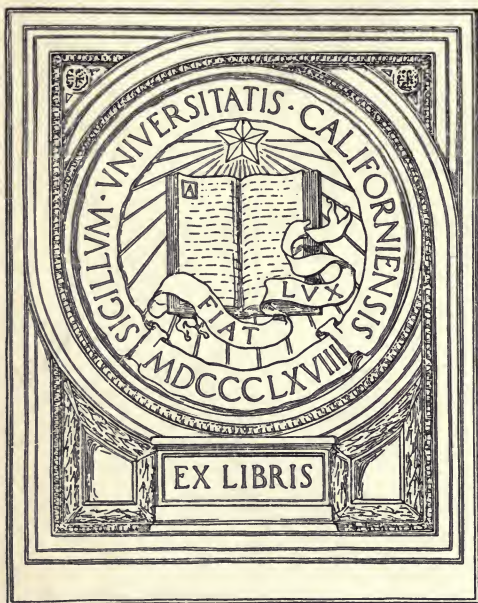
BY
Geraldine Fleming

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Love at the Loom;

OR,

HER GALLANT SWEETHEART

BY

GERALDINE FLEMING

AUTHOR OF

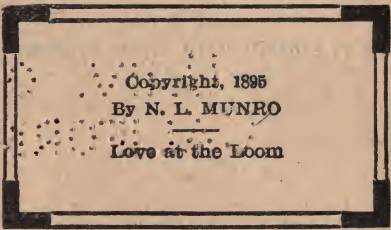
"Hearts of Stone," "The Curse of Beauty," etc.



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—
Love at the Loom

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LOVE AT THE LOOM.

CHAPTER I.

A STRANGE WAGER.

"Come, Donald!"

"Papa, he doesn't wish to go. Tell papa so, Mr. Irwin."

Beautiful Mildred Selden's haughty face was wreathed in seductive smiles.

She loved Donald Irwin with all the passion of her ungoverned nature, and she hoped to see an answering love light in his brown eyes ere he returned again to his Southern estate.

Donald smiled as he gazed on the queenly form and proud, beautiful face, and it seemed to him that his heart was nearer throbbing with love than it ever before had been.

"Tell the truth, Donald!" laughed Mr. Selden good-naturedly. "Will you go with me to see my whirring machinery? Or will you remain here to idly bask in the smiles of beauty?"

Donald bowed low to the pouting beauty, and it

seemed to her that there was a flattering something in his lingering gaze.

"If I consulted only my inclination," he said in a low tone, as his eyes dwelt admiringly on the young woman, "I would remain with Miss Mildred."

"Pshaw!" ejaculated Mr. Selden, "you can see her this afternoon. You are going to ride together. Then the theatre this evening. - Come with me now. Be a good girl, Mildred, and give him up to me for this morning. I want him to see the factory."

Mildred's black eyes flashed an inquiring look into the brown ones of the Southerner, and then a smile softened her beautiful face.

"Is the decision with me, Mr. Irwin," she asked archly.

"It is with you," he replied.

"Then go, and return soon. Only don't fall in love with any of the factory girls."

There was a ring of scornful mirth in the last remark that showed how much beneath her she deemed the workers in her father's factory.

"The memory of your face would be a certain safeguard against such a misfortune," he answered, the tone of his voice conveying flattery to her while the haughty uplifting of his head indicated that he held such creatures as factory girls as entirely out of his world.

"All very well," exclaimed blunt Charles Selden. "Donald Irwin does not need to look for a wife in a factory; but I can tell you that any man might easily lose his heart to some of them who work at the looms."

"How can you talk so, papa?" was Mildred's scornful exclamation.

"It is the truth," was the sturdy response. "Why, we have a girl who has just come to us, who is certainly the most exquisitely beautiful creature I ever set eyes on."

Donald looked full into the eyes of Mildred as he said with a meaning smile:

"Perhaps you have never looked where I have."

Mr. Selden clapped the young man on the shoulder in a friendly way, for it was his wish that his daughter should wed the rich and aristocratic Southerner.

"Oh," he said, "I do not pretend to see with your eyes. The girl I speak of is not a proud, queenly beauty like my Mildred, but she is as winsome and bewitching a girl as ever was seen."

"Papa! papa!" laughed Mildred, a sort of sneer in her voice, "are you going to bring me home a new mama? Think of taking a beauty from the loom to bring here!"

A merry peal of scornful laughter rippled from her red lips. Mr. Selden laughed, too.

"Not much danger of that, Mildred. I don't think much of these December and May marriages; nor did good ever come of wedding out of one's station; but it did occur to me when I looked at the violet-eyed little beauty yesterday that I would like to see how she would look in silk."

"She would probably look like a guy," said Donald. "No doubt she is a round, rosy-cheeked beauty of the plebeian type, who looks her best in calico. It would be a sin to lift her above her station."

"I don't think," murmured Mildred, "that Mr. Irwin is in any danger of falling in love with your factory beauty."

"I am an Irwin," Donald said with a haughty toss of his handsome head, "and there never has been one of all the line who brought shame on his ancestry by wedding beneath him."

"That is right," acquiesced Mr. Selden; "but all the more reason why you should see my pretty Goldie Mowbray, with her violet eyes and sunny curls."

Donald laughed as he exchanged glances with Mildred.

"You have told us of her eyes and of her hair, Mr. Selden. Can you not complete the description?"

Neither of them noticed a faint flush on the elder's cheek as he replied warmly:

"I can and will; and when you return you shall tell Mildred if I am right or wrong. Goldie is about middle height, and is just past her sixteenth year. She has an exquisitely rounded form of perfect proportion. Under her crown of golden curls is a low, broad, white brow, from beneath which glow the luminous eyes of dark violet, so soft and melting with tenderness, love and witchery, that it is hard to get beyond them to see the pink cheeks, the laughing cherry lips, and the rounded, dimpled chin."

"Oh, papa!" laughed Mildred with curling lip, "you have taken the description from some love story. Mr. Irwin, I beg of you to watch papa closely when you are near this paragon of the loom."

"But her voice?" laughed Donald. "What of her voice? To me the voice is the telltale of the whole nature. Tell me hers is silvery and flute-like, musical with soft inflections, and I will admit that you have found a wonder. What about the voice of your beauty, Mr. Selden?"

The latter shrugged his shoulders and laughed.

"I must confess that I have never heard it," he answered.

"Come, then," cried Donald, "I will wager you a box of the best cigars that can be bought that your plebeian beauty has a coarse, rough voice, and that she murders the English language."

"Bet, papa!" laughed Mildred. "You must bet or acknowledge yourself a romancer at once."

"I will take the bet, and I will let Donald be the judge."

"Done!" said Donald; "and this very morning I shall interview the beauty at her loom."

"For my part," added Mildred with a proud uplifting of her queenly head, "I would like to try the experiment of putting her in a silk gown, and making her enter a brilliant drawing-room full of people."

"Would you!" cried her father, with an odd expression in his eyes; "then I will tell you what I will do. I will wager you that diamond necklace you wanted against a kiss that Goldie will pass through the ordeal successfully. What do you say?"

"I say I will take the bet," cried Mildred with flashing eyes.

She had longed for the necklace for a month, and the fear of losing never troubled her.

"Will it not be carrying the thing too far?" asked Donald seriously. "It will be hard on the poor girl to go back to the loom after a taste of luxury such as will be inevitable."

A sneer curled Mildred's lip.

"You are too considerate, Mr. Irwin. You don't know these girls. Any of them would give the eyes

out of her head for the privilege of once appearing in our drawing-room. It is a bet, papa."

"You are sure of what you are doing?" queried Donald in a troubled tone.

His education had been such that he felt himself far above a working girl; but he was a gentleman to the core, and could not bear to do an unchivalrous act.

"It will be all right," answered Mr. Selden confidently. "I cannot lose both bets. As for little Goldie, I can satisfy your scruples by promising to give her an easier position in the factory. Come now!"

Donald put on his coat and held out his hand to Mildred in the old-fashioned, courtly way that gave him such a distinguished manner.

He held her hand a trifle longer than was necessary, too, and there was an exchange of glances that set her heart throbbing as it had never done before.

And through her soul ran quivering the ecstatic consciousness of a thoroughly awakened passion.

The long, black lashes drooped over the velvety eyes, and veiled them; but Donald knew that if he would win the proud beauty for his wife, he had but to ask.

And if he did not love as ardently as she, at least he admired her and believed he loved her enough.

"I will ask her this afternoon to be the mistress of Forestmere Hall," he murmured to himself.

"Au revoir, Miss Mildred!" he said aloud.

"Au revoir!" she responded in a voice that faltered for the first time in her life.

The door closed behind him, and, with a start, she glided to the window and from behind the lace curtains watched him as he crossed the sidewalk and stepped into the waiting carriage.

"So debonair! so aristocratic! so handsome! and he loves me! He loves me and I—I worship him with all the strength of my soul. I had thought I loved him, but how much I did not guess until he waked my slumbering passion by the magic pressure of his hand.

"Donald, my love! come back to me soon!"

CHAPTER II.

"OH, HOW I SHALL LOVE HIM!"

Who can say what will happen to one in the space of one short hour? What maiden heart, fancy free at this moment, can be sure that it will not be enthralled in love's bondage the next?

That morning, before luxurious Mildred had even opened her scornful black eyes, the girls in her father's great factory had assembled in the monster building, waiting for the steam whistle to scream out the signal to work.

And a merry, happy lot of girls they were, though many of them had all they could do to keep their poor gowns patched in any semblance of being whole.

"Love!" cried one. "It is a thing I know nothing about; so don't ask me. Ask Clara."

"That's so; Clara! I say, Clara! how does it feel to be in love?"

"How should I know?" was the blushing response.

"How should she know! Girls! she wants us to believe that she doesn't walk home every night with handsome Harry Grey, foreman of the second floor. Come, Clara! be a nice girl and tell us how it feels to be in love."

"As if you didn't know," retorted Clara, her cheeks rosy. "Gertie has had twice as many beaux as ever I had, girls. She can tell you more about love than I can. Don't you remember Tom Mason, and how she made him dance after her until he had almost lost his senses?"

"That's so, Gertie. You tell us how it feels to be in love," cried a laughing chorus of girls.

"I'd rather tell you something none of you knows," was the retort; "anyhow it's indescribable."

"It's great fun, is all I can say," murmured a dark-eyed little coquette.

"Fun! yes," chimed in Clara; "but the best fun is in watching the fellows. They think you take every word in earnest."

"A man in love is such a fool!" said Gertie with an air of knowledge.

The other girls laughed.

"You don't think so if you love him," came from Gertie quickly.

"Oh! you're both silly, then," laughed Clara.

"I don't think love is a bit silly," asserted Gertie bravely. "I leave it to Goldie Mowbray there. I'm sure that if any girl ever had lots of lovers she's the one."

Every eye on the instant was turned on the flushed face of the girl, whose wonderful violet eyes had been

wandering wonderingly from face to face during the discussion.

She started at finding herself the object of scrutiny, and the compliment on her beauty implied in Gertie's words confused her for a moment.

Then a sweet, shy smile wreathed her coral lips, and into her eyes leaped an earnestness as tender as it was true.

"I never was in love," she said simply.

The girls did not laugh. Somehow it seemed as if her way of speaking of it had made the subject sacred. They crowded about her and Gertie murmured:

"Ah! you may never have been in love, but as sure as the sun shines you have had scores of lovers. One cannot be so beautiful and be unsought. Have you not had lovers?"

"Yes; but never, never lured them on. I could not do that."

"Have you never loved any man a tiny bit?" asked Clara wonderingly. "Why, there have been lots of times when for a little while I thought I was going to be in love."

"I have liked men," Goldie answered earnestly; "but I never loved anyone. Sometimes I think I never shall fall in love."

"Every heart has its mate," one of the girls ventured.

"That may be, but it seems as if mine would never come. I think love is so sweet and good to think of that it must be like heaven in reality."

"Do you think a girl can be sure when she meets her love?" whispered one of the girls nearest her.

"How can I answer when I have never met my love? I only know that it seems to me as if my heart would leap from my breast the instant my eyes fell on the face of him who is to be my love. Ah; I never have loved; but I know that when my time comes, I shall give my whole soul, my every thought, my very life to him."

Her violet eyes were luminous now; her bosom was heaving, and through her moist red lips the words came as if borne on sweet, sighing zephyrs.

"Her love will be a very passion of life," murmured Gertie to Clara. "It will be more terrible than death to her if she be not loved in return. But, oh! who could help worshiping such a wondrous, bewitching beauty as hers? If I were a man I should go mad over her."

"Suppose," asked Clara, uttering aloud the words of her friend, "you were to love one who could not love you?"

Those who looked at that wondrous face th...

never forgot the look of fear and horror that crept into the violet eyes.

It seemed as if she searched each face there as with a premonition of a thing that would surely happen to her, and was making a response that was but a doom.

"I—I could die," she whispered.

There was a prolonged silence, unbroken until one of the girls exclaimed with a shudder she could not repress:

"That will never happen to you; you are too beautiful. You will be able to choose your lover."

The screaming of the whistle prevented any further conversation; and as if glad to break it off, the girls ran laughing and talking from the cloak room, where the conversation had taken place.

Goldie followed more slowly, and on her beautiful face there was a troubled expression.

"How came I to talk so?" she murmured to herself. "Why should I talk of love? How do I know what I shall feel? I wonder is it true that when some important event in our lives is about to take place there is a premonition of it within our hearts?"

She was at her loom in time to see that it was going with the others; and in a little while it was whirring, rattling and thumping with a deafening noise.

But she did not heed the noise then, though usually,

it was very unpleasant to her. Her brain was as busy as the loom.

The thought of that love which was to come to her and make or wreck her life was causing her pulses to throb almost in unison with the thumping machine.

She recalled, too, the last talk she had ever had with her poor mother.

Her father she had never known. He had died, her mother told her, before she was born.

"Goldie, my darling!" the dying mother had murmured, "you are like me. Within the calmness of your nature there lies hidden depths of love and passion, of which even you will not be aware until some day when a spark shall leap out from the eyes of some man and set your soul ablaze."

"Mother! mother! how strangely you talk!" Goldie had sobbed, wondering why such thoughts should trouble the brain of one on the verge of the grave.

"Such talk is strange to you now, and will be until your soul is stirred to its depths, and you know the meaning of the word love."

"Love, mother! I shall never love," the girl responded.

"Yes, you will love, and you will love with the very frenzy of passion, my child; and what I wish to warn you against is loving one whose station in life is above yours. With poverty there is honesty and truth. Give

your love to one who toils for his living, and your lot will be peaceful and happy."

"I will remember, mother."

That had been a year ago, and the orphan had often recalled in wonder and smiling surprise the strange words.

She was so beautiful that it seemed as if men but looked at her to love her; but not once had her heart beat faster for the glance of any man's eye.

She had gently but firmly checked the first advance of any lover toward a declaration; and more than one honest fellow had left her saying her heart was of ice.

But to-day she had been asked to love and her answer had been a surprise to herself. She had been asked similar questions before, and had laughed them away. Why had she spoken with such terrible earnestness to-day?

She did not know. Her usually placid nature was stirred and troubled. She was certain of one thing, however, and that was that her dying mother had spoken words of truth.

"I shall love him! oh, how I shall love him!" she murmured to herself, and blushed, though no eye was upon her.

There was no thought in her mind that would picture to her what the lover was to be like; but there

was a new life born within her soul, which throbbed with the power and passion of love.

So there she stood at the tiresome loom, doing her work with sure and deft fingers, but with her brain pulsing to an unknown harmony, through which there shot strange discords.

CHAPTER III.

GOLDIE MEETS HER LOVE.

Mr. Selden led Donald Irwin through the noisy factory, pointing out to him the various improvements that he had instituted in the machinery.

"You should have such factories in the South," Mr. Selden said.

Donald answered yes mechanically. His eyes were constantly alert to pick out from the hundreds of girls he saw the especial one of whom Mr. Selden had spoken.

He did not like to remind Mildred's father of the bet that had been made, lest he should suspect him of dwelling too much on the thought of the pretty factory girl.

But Mr. Selden had not forgotten Goldie. His young companion would have been startled had he known how much the beautiful factory girl was in the mind of the other.

They went from floor to floor, and at last Mr. Selden stopped before entering the door of one of the great rooms.

"Donald," he said, looking earnestly into the eyes of the other, "you shall now see the little girl of whom I spoke."

"Ah!" Donald said.

He wondered why his heart should throb quicker, because he was going to see the face of a pretty factory girl.

What was she to him, that the thought of her, when he had not even seen her, should make his blood leap swifter in his veins?

"Pshaw!" he murmured scornfully. "What would the haughty Mildred say if she knew that I went to meet a common factory worker like a bashful school-boy? This is absurd."

Very absurd; but it was none the less true that the Southern aristocrat, who had been presented at every royal court in Europe, suddenly found himself inexplicably disconcerted at the thought of meeting a factory girl.

Meanwhile Mr. Selden, misconstruing the monosyllabic response of his companion, said uneasily:

"My dear boy! pardon me if I suggest that you do not treat the little girl as if she were not as good as anybody else. She is only a factory girl, it is true, but she is a lady in manners."

"Have no fear, Mr. Selden; any woman is entitled to my utmost courtesy."

"There spoke your father!" cried Mr. Selden. "He was the truest gentleman I ever met."

"He has ever been my pattern," responded Donald.

Mr. Selden opened the door of the room, and stood at the entrance, scanning the machines until with a sort of sigh he murmured:

"She is here."

Donald's eyes had been running over the room, too; but they had seen no face that seemed so extremely beautiful to him.

The truth was, that as she stood at her machine, there was nothing but the crown of her golden head visible to them.

But Mr. Selden knew that crown of spun gold.

"I see no one who answers to the description," Donald said with a slight smile.

"Have patience! I do not fear to show her to you. There can be but one opinion of her face, however opinions may differ as to her voice."

"You are beginning to be frightened," said Donald.

The old man looked into the face of the younger and smiled composedly.

"Donald, I believe her voice will prove the sweetest music that ever your ears drank in. But you shall not hear it amid the rattle of the looms. She shall come to the office where there is quiet."

"You are enthusiastic," was all Donald said; but there was a curious look in his eyes as they rested on the face of the other.

"What was there between the pretty factory girl and Charles Selden?" he asked himself.

The girls looked askance at the two gentlemen as they passed by the noisy looms; and more than one took a second look at the younger, who bore himself so debonairly.

"I wonder if he is beautiful Mildred's lover?" whispered Clara to Gertie, who stood near her.

"He is handsome enough for some girl to go wild over," sighed Gertie. "I suppose he hardly knows we live. Ah! it must be wonderful to be rich and have all you wish."

Gertie was right in fancying that Donald was hardly aware of their existence. Something strange seemed to hold him in thrall.

He passed by each girl, studying her face with an earnest look, and then forgetting it as he scanned the next.

Suddenly he felt his arm twitched by Mr. Selden, and he could catch the murmured words above the rattle and din:

"Here she is!"

Like lightning the eyes of Donald flashed by one girl and another and came by a sort of instinct to where Goldie stood by her loom.

He never forgot that picture as long as he lived, and in the days to come, when he was at war with

his own heart, and the whole world seemed black and drear, that picture would rise up before him, and, like a sudden, passing flood of sunshine, would blot out all else.

Deep in thought, her brain revolving the strange new thoughts that had been suddenly born there, she stood with her beautiful head uplifted, her eyes dreamily seeing far beyond the rattling machine.

[She was a vision of perfect beauty, and as Donald gazed he ceased to hear the noise, he forgot his surroundings, and Goldie was a fairy at her magic loom, weaving the web in which she would enmesh the victims of her wondrous beauty.

"Is she beautiful?" he heard whispered in his ear.

Donald laughed like one intoxicated.

Mr. Selden nodded his head as if he understood.

"Wait until you see her full face," he said.

All this had passed quickly; but it seemed to Donald, as he stepped forward by the side of Mr. Selden, that he had suddenly awakened from a long trance.

They stood by the side of Goldie, who was operating her loom mechanically. Donald had seen the other girls working their looms, and had given the matter no thought.

He shuddered as he saw that a movement too slow, a careless thrust of the dimpled hand, might end in a mutilated arm, if no worse.

He held his breath as he gazed at the rounded form, and at the gracefully poised head, with its coronet of golden curls.

A shiver seemed to run over Goldie, and she turned her head, as if suddenly conscious of the presence of some one.

Her eyes saw Mr. Selden first, and then wandered to the face of Donald. It was on his face that they rested; but she saw him from head to foot.

Then her eyes met his. There was a flashing look between the violet and the brown, and the color faded from the round cheeks.

All the blood of her body seemed to have leaped to her heart, so that it was beating and throbbing like a wild bird in the hands of its captor.

Donald stood like one who sees beyond this life. Her beauty was marvelous, but it was not that which enchained his senses. It was something else.

His soul seemed to be rejoicing as if it had met and known the very glory of life. Donald gasped for breath.

They might have stood thus forever, staring at each other, unconscious of the world; but the terrible machinery stayed its movements for nothing. The little hand wandered in the way, was caught and——

It would have been death but that Donald was

quicker than the machine; and his strength then was that of Samson.

The deadly machine was broken, and Goldie Mowbray lay in the arms of her rescuer, her eyes drinking in all that his eyes unconsciously told her.

She had met her love at last. She knew it, and her heart was throbbing wildly. The future was beyond her reading.

CHAPTER IV.

A COLD PROPOSAL.

In an instant the room was in an uproar, but that was quelled by the foreman.

"Follow me," Mr. Selden said with pallid lips.

Goldie could have walked, but ere she could attempt to do so, she was clasped close to Donald's breast, and he carried her to a little room away from the noise.

"Are you injured, Goldie?" murmured Mr. Selden.

She looked at him for an instant, then turned her eyes to Donald's face, and slipped from his grasp to her feet.

"Thank you, sir! I am not injured at all. And, oh, sir!" addressing Donald, with downcast eyes, "you saved my life."

It was as Mr. Selden had said—Goldie's voice was the sweetest music that had ever thrilled his ears.

"If I had not stood there looking at you, nothing would have happened," Donald answered.

"I felt your eyes," Goldie murmured, almost as if talking to herself.

There was a passionate wish in the heart of Donald Irwin that Mr. Selden would leave them alone for a moment.

"Could you not procure her a glass of water?" he asked.

Mr. Selden took his eyes from the beautiful face with a start.

"Yes; of course."

He left them alone, and there was silence between them. Now that he was able to speak what should he say? Why did not she speak?

They stared at each other like two dumb, frightened animals. Donald saw Mr. Selden approaching.

"Goldie," he stammered, "I shall be waiting to see you this evening when you go home. You will not deny me?"

"Oh, no! I shall be glad to see you, sir."

She took the glass of water from Donald's hand, and drank some because he seemed to wish it.

It annoyed Donald to have Mr. Selden keep his eyes fastened on Goldie's face. What had that old man to do with such as she?

"Let us go," he said abruptly. "She is well now. Are you not well?"

The tone and question were sharp, but she smiled in his eyes and answered:

"I am quite well. I was not hurt at all. I am sorry to have given you so much trouble."

"It was no trouble, little Goldie," said Mr. Selden.

"But you must not go back to the loom. I will find a place for you in another department."

"Thank you, but I am all right here, sir."

"Tut! I will give orders downstairs. You shall have a better place. I had intended it, anyhow."

She looked surprised and thanked him, but her eyes were constantly looking into Donald's.

Mr. Selden went out with Donald, who flashed one meaning glance at Goldie as he went.

What he had done or said he was hardly conscious of.

"Well," cried the older man, when they were in a place where they could talk without interruption, "have I won?"

"You have won. I do not believe she is what she seems. She is a lady."

"Most working girls are that. But is she not beautiful?"

Mr. Selden's tone angered Donald unreasonably. He turned upon him half fiercely.

"What an interest you take in her! You are very enthusiastic."

Mr. Selden flushed.

"That is true, Donald," he said without noticing the other's manner. "The fact is I am in love with the little beauty, in spite of what I said to Mildred this morning."

"You would make her your wife?" cried Donald harshly.

"Why not? Of course it would never do for a young man like you, Donald; but when Mildred is married, I shall be lonely, and shall need some young person around me."

"Buy her, I suppose," ejaculated Donald. "How do you know she is for sale?"

"I suppose any girl in her place would marry a man with my money. Come, give me a lift with the affair."

"What do you want me to do?"

"You know my bet with Mildred?"

"Yes. Well?"

"Well, don't you see that if I can trap Mildred into introducing Goldie into society on the plea of settling the bet, I can keep my little girl there in spite of Mildred."

"Oh, I don't know. Why should I help you against your daughter? You have no right to ask it."

"Well, be neutral, anyhow. Don't take sides against me. Won't she look a queen in society? What a sensation! Did you ever see such beauty in your life! Donald, don't you believe she will have me?"

"No, I don't. Good-by! I must go."

He turned abruptly away and went swiftly down the stairs.

He was furious, but did not know why, excepting that he explained to himself that a man like Mr. Selden should be ashamed to think of marrying a factory girl.

"But she won't have him," he muttered, with a sort of savage exultation.

The carriage whirled him back to the Selden mansion. As he stepped out to go up the stoop he recalled that he had left the house with the determination formed in his mind to return and ask Mildred to become his wife and mistress of Forestmere Hall.

As he slowly mounted the steps another face, with violet eyes, rose up in his mind as one that would look infinitely better than the darkly beautiful face of Mildred in the old hall.

"Am I mad?" he panted suddenly. "Do I forget what is due my family? Take a factory girl whom I have seen but once to my home? I will ask Mildred to be my wife. I will save myself from this madness which courses in my veins."

He rang the bell vehemently, though the door was opened while he still had his hand on the knob.

Mildred was in the little parlor beyond the drawing-room.

She said she liked it because it was cozy, and invited him to sit down.

She studied his face earnestly as he sat down, and

saw that something had happened to disturb him. His knitted brows told that.

"Did you see the factory?" she asked.

"Yes, indeed."

"And the—the beauty of the loom?" she queried, busying herself with her fancy work.

He flashed a swift, strange glance at her, shivered slightly, and replied in a low tone:

"Yes, I saw her. She is beautiful. I lost my bet, too."

She looked up quickly, the color coming into her face.

"Is her voice so sweet, then?"

He should have said then that it was less musical than Mildred's, but the question brought back to his ear the tones of the flute-like voice, and he answered in a low tone:

"The sweetest I ever heard."

Something seemed to grip the heart of the listening beauty.

"Perhaps I shall lose my bet, too," she gasped.

"Who can tell? She was not what I expected to see."

He closed his eyes as he spoke as if to shut out the vision of the wondrous beauty. Mildred seemed to divine his thoughts.

"I must be the judge of her appearance in silk," she said. "When is the trial to be made?"

"I do not know."

He rose and walked to the window. How he would like to see Goldie in a silk gown! What would she be like in a bridal dress?"

The madness was coming on him again. He seemed to feel her heart throbbing against his as it had done for the few ecstatic moments while he held her in his arms.

He ground his teeth and clinched his hands. To think that he had seen her but once, and had spoken so few words to her! She had bewitched him. No wonder old Mr. Selden was crazed by her.

Likely enough she was a designing creature who had practiced her wiles of look and tone and manner. That was how she had won Mr. Selden.

"Miss Selden," he exclaimed suddenly, his voice husky with the emotions he battled with, "I must say something to you. If it is abrupt you must forgive me. I have intended for some time——" he stopped and fought away a vision of a pair of violet eyes. "Mildred, I went away this morning determined that when I returned I would ask you to be my wife. Will you?"

It was an odd wooing, and the color came and went

in her proud face as she listened and heard the words she had so longed to hear.

They did not come as she had dreamed they would, in soft, murmurous accents, but in a harsh, constrained way as if he were forcing himself to repeat words memorized.

And yet she would not say a word to show that she noticed. Her heart was torn with fear and jealousy, but, at least, she had won him. She held out her hand to him, and said:

"I will answer you as frankly as you ask: Yes, I will be your wife, for I love you, Donald."

She looked to see some sign of joy at her softly uttered words, but there was none, and she muttered to herself:

"He has asked me to be his wife, but he does not love me. Who has come between us? Woe to her, whoever she may be."

They lunched together, and he tried to act as he customarily did, but she could see that he was not himself.

They went for the ride together as arranged, but she was sure he did not know what he was saying half the time. Once he asked suddenly:

"At what time does the factory shut down in the evening?"

She told him, and wondered why he asked. His

manner troubled her, and yet she dared not speak of it.

After the ride he sat with her for a while, but was very restless until, about five o'clock, he rose and said:

"There is something I must do, Mildred. I forgot it. I will return in time for dinner."

He put on his coat and hat and hurried out. The door had hardly closed ere Mildred, with set teeth, had thrown on her street garments.

The next moment she had glided silently from the house and was following him.

"I shall know now why he acts so strangely," she muttered.

CHAPTER V.

MR. SELDEN IS ENTHRALLED.

No sooner had Donald gone from the factory than Mr. Selden turned his thoughts to Goldie.

He had conceived for the beautiful creature a passion which swayed his whole being, and which kept his thoughts constantly filled with her image.

Somehow it was the same passion of love which animates the heart of a younger person. There was less of mad longing, perhaps, and more of a fixed determination to possess her.

If he had been younger he might have doubted his ability to win her, but it did not occur to him now. He had lived long enough to have learned the power of money, and it was not strange if he had also come to think that there was no limit to its ability to purchase anything.

Often, when he was alone, he dwelt with infinite satisfaction on the look of charming surprise that would fill her violet eyes when he told her that he actually intended for her the honor of bearing his name.

The accident which had happened to her had given him a terrible shock. What if she had been injured or killed? It made him shudder to think of it.

He had intended to gradually lift her from her present position at the loom to other less hard work, and at last to put her in a position where she would earn enough money to dress better.

The accident, however, startled him into doing differently. He could not bear to think that it was possible for the bewitching creature to run other similar risks.

"I will make her my typewriter," he muttered at last, with a joyous ring in his voice. "Why did I not think of it before? Then she will be here with me all the time, and will gradually learn to look on me with less awe than is natural for her now."

He tapped his bell, and a clerk entered the room.

"Mr. Snowden, go upstairs and ask Miss Goldie Mowbray to come here. She has just met with a serious accident, and I wish to talk with her."

In a little while came a timid knock at his door. He rubbed his hands with satisfaction and called out pleasantly:

"Come in!"

It was Goldie who shyly entered the room, and it seemed to the elderly millionaire that she had never looked so beautiful.

In fact, the accident had not left her pale and wilted as he had expected to see her. Her cheeks glowed with a deeper pink, and her violet eyes, always won-

drously beautiful, seemed to shine with an unwonted light.

She blushed divinely as she encountered the admiring eyes of her employer, and cast down her own. Mr. Selden smiled complacently. It delighted him to see in her such a shy spirit. It augured well for his plans.

"Miss Mowbray," he said, gently; then added with just a shade of tenderness in his tone: "But I will call you Goldie, if you please. You do not care, my dear?"

She glanced up in innocent surprise at his kindness, but never dreamed that the handsome, fatherly old gentleman could mean anything more than the commonest kindness.

"Oh, no, sir!" she murmured; "you may call me what you wish, I am sure."

"Well, then, little Goldie, I sent for you to speak with you concerning your accident. I cannot tell you how shocked and distressed I was. I hope you have sustained no serious injury."

"No, sir. I am sure nothing will come of it. I was not hurt at all, thanks to that brave gentleman. Oh, how brave he was!"

Her eyes shone with a soft and tender light as she spoke, and her flute-like voice quivered with suppressed emotion.

"Yes," replied Mr. Selden, unconscious even yet of the change in the heart that throbbed beneath her swelling bosom; though if he had not been so intent on his own feelings of intense admiration, he could not have helped seeing how deeply she was moved as she spoke of Donald.

"I hope he was not injured at all," she breathed in a low, eager tone. "I was so—so confused that I did not think to ask him."

"Oh, no, he was not hurt. Not likely. Donald Irwin is as strong and skillful as a knight of old when a woman is in question. He is a fine fellow."

"Oh," murmured Goldie, clasping her little hands in an ecstasy of admiration, "he is the bravest man I ever saw. It was like a knight of old to save me in that way; was it not?"

"Of course! of course!" admitted Mr. Selden, a little testily, "those things are characteristic of youth. I was so myself when I was a boy; but, little Goldie," and his voice sank a little lower, "there are better and more solid qualities to be found in older men. I think you will find me very good and kind to you."

"Oh, yes, sir," she murmured, wondering a little, "I am sure you are very good. All the girls say you are."

"Well, well! you shall not make them out liars, little Goldie. I intend to prove to you that I am all that the

girls say I am. Sit down, my dear. I did not intend to keep you standing. In fact, I forgot almost everything but your pretty face."

She stared at him in surprise; but as there was nothing bold in his expression she could not think wrong of him, so concluded that he was just a nice, fatherly old gentleman.

She blushed and sat down in the chair he indicated. She hoped sincerely that he would not compliment her any more.

"I have intended for some time," he said with a smile of benevolence, "to take you away from that loom. You are fitted for better work, little Goldie."

"You are very kind, sir; but I am afraid I cannot do anything else as well."

He got up from his chair and approached her. He was thinking he had never looked on such a witching face in his life before. He could not help taking advantage of his age to lay his hand on her golden head.

He had supposed he could do it in a sufficiently fatherly way to keep her from suspecting anything of his real feelings.

But as his hand came nearer to her gleaming curls, it began to tremble and shake; and when he let it rest on the dainty little head, it seemed to him that every

nerve in his body tingled with successive shocks as of electricity.

Something like a sudden madness seized him, and for a moment it seemed to him that it was out of his power to resist the impulse to catch her in his arms and strain her to his breast.

Then his reason resumed its sway, and he said in a voice that was husky from restrained passion:

"Little Goldie, you are too good to be in there doing that rough work."

Something made her draw instinctively away from his hand; and she said, as she glanced up into his face:

"Oh, sir! not too good. No one is too good to work. I have nothing to complain of. There are others who have a harder time than I have."

"That may be," he said, drawing away, for he feared himself if he remained so close to her; "but it does not affect my purpose. You at least shall not remain at the loom. Why, those little hands are already growing roughened by your work."

He caught up the dimpled hand as he spoke and held it in his for a moment, his pulses throbbing wildly as he did so.

It seemed to him that he was affected as by some spell when he came in contact with her. He dropped her hand as if it had been on fire and turned away.

"It does not hurt my hands to be rough," she said, a faint touch of haughtiness in her tone.

"Perhaps not," he replied, "but they are fit for better uses. I am going to make you my typewriter and private secretary."

"Me! oh, sir, I know nothing of typewriting, and I do not even know the duties of a secretary."

"You shall soon learn, my dear. As for typewriting, you shall go to a school where they teach such things, at my expense."

"But, sir——"

"Not a word, my dear Goldie! I have made up my mind that you are just the person I want for the place, and you shall make no denial."

"I am sure I shall not suit," Goldie said blankly.

She hardly knew how to refuse, and yet did not see how she could fill a position she had never even contemplated.

"Nonsense! you are ten times as bright as the majority of girls who do such things. You are to begin to-morrow morning."

"Well, sir, I shall do my best to please you."

He bent a sudden look upon her beautiful face, and said:

"Have no fear but you will succeed, my dear. Be here at nine o'clock in the morning, and I will give

you your first lessons in being secretary. In the afternoon you shall go to some school."

"Thank you, sir."

"You are welcome. But have you no curiosity to know what your pay will be?"

"I suppose it will be less at first than I am getting now," she faltered, wondering how she could make ends meet until she was earning more.

"Less!" he cried with a laugh of scorn; "why, my dear, you will have fifteen dollars a week to begin with."

"So much?" she murmured.

"And soon," he added eagerly, "you shall have more. And now go home. Do not work any more to-day."

It was on her tongue to thank him for his kindness, but she suddenly remembered the words of Donald, appointing a meeting, and stammered:

"I—I would rather remain, thank you. I—I prefer to work."

Then, fearing he would insist, she fled from the room, and hastened to the upper floor, knowing she could find something to do.

CHAPTER VI.

DONALD DECLARES HIS PASSION.

The foreman of the room found something for her to do, and it was not until the noon hour that the girls had any opportunity to question her.

They began by declaring it was mean of Mr. Selden to make her work the rest of the day after her narrow escape. But she assured them that he had wished her to go home, and then told them what he was going to do for her.

There was a sudden silence at her words, and she saw that the girls were all exchanging glances. Gertie was the first one to speak.

"Well, you are a lucky girl," she said. "The handsomest man I ever saw rescues you, and carries you away in his arms, and——"

"See how she blushes!" cried Clara, with a laugh. "Confess, Goldie, that you liked that part of the adventure!"

"It was very noble of Mr. Irwin to save me," Goldie stammered.

"And very noble of Mr. Selden to give you such a soft place," said one of the girls dryly.

The others laughed, but Goldie did not comprehend what hidden meaning lay under the words.

"But it's a very good thing to have two strings to your bow," said Clara.

"Or two beaus on a string," laughed another girl.

"Especially where the string is golden," added Gertie.

"How can you talk so?" cried Goldie, in distress. "I will not listen!"

And she turned toward the door and left the room.

"I wonder if she has lost her heart to that handsome stranger," said Clara.

"I don't know," some one answered; "but I saw him look down at her as he carried her to the little room, and the flame that leaped from his dark eyes set my heart throbbing. I say it will be a match."

"A match!" sneered one of the older girls. "Let Goldie Mowbray beware of such as he. I have seen such men before. He is an aristocrat to the tips of his fingers, and he would no more wed her than he would pluck his flashing eyes out."

"Flora is right," whispered another. "See how Mr. Selden is getting her near him. Do you think he wants to marry her? She is beautiful, and men must love her; but she should be careful not to lose her heart out of her station. Rich men do not marry poor girls outside of stories."

"You needn't be afraid of Goldie," declared Gertie, warmly. "She is too good and pure to need any-

body's warning. Besides, why shouldn't she marry a rich aristocrat? Where is there a more beautiful girl? Where is a better?"

"Beauty and goodness!" was the scornful exclamation of the first speaker. "What will they avail her if the man she gives her heart to wishes to deceive her. As good as she have been betrayed by false-hearted men, and I tell you that those who watch beautiful Goldie Mowbray will have cause to weep for her."

Goldie, meanwhile, disturbed in mind by what she had heard, but unable in her innocence to comprehend the hidden meanings, kept at her work faithfully all the afternoon.

And soon she had forgotten everything in the blissful thought that Donald Irwin had asked her to meet him that evening.

It seemed to her that she could still feel the pressure of his strong arms about her, and her bosom rose and fell in a tumult of delight whenever she recalled the expression of his eyes as he gazed into hers, and bade her meet him.

She knew that she loved him with all the passion of her strong nature, and it seemed hardly a possible thought that he did not love her equally so.

It was to her as if she had been asleep, and had suddenly awakened in a world so full of joy and happiness that she was fairly dazed by her emotions.

She dreamed all the afternoon of what he would say to her when they met. And a hundred times her lips parted to murmur the words that were in her heart to say to him.

Not that she would really be so unmaidenly as to say them to him until he had made it easy for her to do so, though.

But how her heart throbbed that evening when the factory doors opened and let her out with the others!

The others might be tired and anxious only to reach their homes, but she was as if she had rested on a bed of roses the whole day.

Her step was springy, and no one had ever before seen even her eyes so full of the lambent light of joy.

And yet, as she glided apart from the other girls, and felt that her handsome deliverer might join her at any moment, her heart began to flutter with fear.

She walked on, listening for the step she was sure she would know, hoping at each moment to hear the voice which had the power to send the blood leaping in her veins.

It seemed to her that she must not look around or appear to care, yet a terrible pain was in her breast as she walked on and there came not the sounds she had longed for all the day since Donald had left her.

She knew she was alone, and that none of the girls

could be near to see, and in the midst of her poignant fear, she began to ask herself if she might not have taken a way that led her from him.

Then sounded a step behind her, and it seemed to her that her heart swelled and crowded up into her throat until she was nigh suffocation. But it was the fullness of a joy she had never felt before.

Her love was near, and the rest of the world faded out of sight and mind.

He was near, and his voice would sound on her entranced ear in a moment.

"Goldie!"

Her breath came and went between her parted red lips, and all she could do was to look up into his eyes like a dumb, adoring creature.

He took her rounded arm in his hand so that he might walk by her side in greater harmony with her step. His touch thrilled her so that she seemed to float rather than walk.

"Goldie," he said, his voice low and murmurous with a vibrant passion he could not control, "I was afraid I had missed you."

"I feared it, too," she whispered brokenly.

"You hoped I would come, then?" he asked huskily.

He was fighting himself with all his strength, but the words seemed to come without his volition.

He had gone to the factory, and had struggled with

himself for strength to turn back and not see the face which had bewitched his senses.

He had walked away from the factory at the last moment, and then had turned fiercely back, saying to himself he would see Goldie, but would be strong.

Now he was walking by her side, trying to form words which should let her know that he was engaged to Mildred Selden; and instead of speaking those words, his lips were uttering such as conveyed love to the heart of her whose violet eyes had confessed her adoration.

"You said you would come," was her low response to his question.

"And you knew I would do as I said?" he queried softly.

Her only answer was another glance up into his face. They were near the brilliant light of an electric lamp, and he could read the pure soul behind the violet eyes. And he could also read the love that possessed that soul; he could see what it is given only to love to see.

"Goldie," he panted, "do you think you could always trust me? Are you so sure of my truth that you would never doubt it?"

"I do not think I could ever doubt you," she murmured.

"I call you Goldie," he said, his lips near her cheek; "why do you not say Donald to me?"

"It will not be hard," she murmured shyly; "I have been calling you so to myself all day."

A cry of fierce joy broke from his lips and his arm stole about her rounded waist. He no longer had control of himself. He knew that his heart loved her, and that he could no longer resist its pleading.

The future might take care of itself.

"Goldie," he panted, his breath fanning her cheek, "your eyes and your words tell me that you love me. If my eyes tell the truth of my heart they must reveal a consuming passion to you. As for my words—Goldie, I love you with an intensity that makes me forget everything else."

"Donald!" she whispered, turning her head to look up into his eyes.

For a moment they seemed to grow intoxicated; then their lips met in a rapturous, ecstatic kiss.

"Goldie, we never met until this morning—a few hours ago—but the moment my eyes fell upon you I knew you were sent from heaven to be my mate. Do you believe in affinities?"

"I do now, Donald. I never loved before. I had a strange feeling in my heart this morning ere I saw you. It was as if Heaven were preparing me for your coming. When I saw you I understood. My heart

seemed to leap from my breast and fly to you. I felt your heart enter in its place. I loved you and I knew that you loved me."

"It is fate," he whispered.

"Why do you say fate? That is a word that frightens me, Donald. And your arm trembles as it holds me."

He did not answer in words, but as there was no one near to see them, he drew her to his breast and rained passionate kisses on her lips and all over her beautiful face.

"Fate!" he said hoarsely; "we can defy fate, or bless it. If we love, that is enough."

"Yes," she murmured, "it is enough."

"I have a little home in the far South, Goldie. You will go there with me, will you not? You will go there and hide with me from the world."

"I will do what you wish, Donald. If I have you I do not care for all the rest of the world."

CHAPTER VII.

MILDRED'S MAD LOVE.

Mr. Selden had dressed for dinner and was sitting in the library, waiting for his daughter and Donald to return home, for he had been told that both were out, and had naturally concluded that they had gone together.

He was glancing over the evening paper in a complacent mood, for he was well satisfied with the events of the day.

The chief thing that pleased him was that his affair with Goldie was in such a fair way; but he was also gratified with a turn he had made on Wall Street.

"Everything prospers with me," he murmured. "Ah, when I think of Mildred wedded to Donald, and little Goldie ruling here in her stead!"

He nodded his head in the extremity of his joy over the thought, and was trying to settle down to a perusal of his paper, when the door was thrown violently open, and Mildred swept into the room, her eyes flaming, and her lips distorted with an inward rage.

"My dear!" he cried, starting up. "What is the matter? Where is Donald?"

"Donald!" she gasped. "That factory girl! curse her!"

"What factory girl? Of whom are you talking? What is the matter? Be calm! Where is Donald?"

She grasped him by the arm, her black eyes flaming.

"I left him holding your factory girl in his arms, his kisses raining on her lips, his words whispered in her ears."

Mr. Selden cried out in amazement.

"Are you mad? Do you mean Goldie Mowbray?"

"Is that her name? I suppose it is she. He came home from his visit to the factory, and I could see that something had happened. Can you tell me?"

"We reached her loom just as a terrible accident came near ending her life."

"I wish it had!"

"Donald, with great presence of mind and strength, rescued her."

"I wish he had let her perish in torment. What then?"

"Nothing then, my dear. He carried her into a small side room, and she revived there. Then he left. That is all."

"Ah! You are blind. There must have been more. I cannot be mistaken. I had hardly ceased to tell him that I would wed him when——"

"You would wed him? He has proposed then?"

"He has proposed and I have accepted because I love him. Do you understand what it means when I say

I love him? It means that a volcano has burst its bonds and is pouring a torrent of burning passion from its heart. I love him and I will destroy what comes in my way."

She looked so fierce and wild that he shuddered at her expression.

"I say," she went on, "that I will destroy what comes between him and me. The words were still sounding in my ears when he abruptly left me. I knew something was wrong, and I followed him. I saw him meet a golden-haired, blue-eyed beauty, who came from the factory. Are there two who answer to the description?"

"You saw him meet Goldie?" her father gasped.

"Yes, meet her and twine his arm about her waist, and press his fervid kisses on her lips."

"And he asked you to be his wife?"

"He had asked me to be his wife. But it is his love I want. Do you think I would be satisfied with the dry husks of wifehood, when his love was given to another? I will kill her!"

"And he knew," cried her father, angrily, "that I intended to make her my wife!"

"Your wife?" and his daughter turned on him with a glance of unutterable scorn.

"Yes, my wife. You will be gone, and I shall be lonely. How dared he do it?"

"And you would wed a girl from your factory? Have you no sense of pride? Do you think I would——"

She stopped, as a new thought claimed her attention. Her father answered with dogged wrath:

"I did not intend to consult you. You should have the husband of your choice; why should not I wed where I pleased?"

She clutched him by the arm.

"Marry her. I will help you. She must be taken from him. I will not let her come between us. Do you know that I mean it when I say I will kill her rather than let her have his love?"

"You will help me take her from him?" he cried eagerly, for it had seemed a moment before as if he had lost all hope of winning the beautiful creature, and as he gave up hope he learned how madly he wanted her.

"Yes. But we must lose no time. She is a designing creature who will try to lure him on to desert me and wed her. And he must love her passionately, or he would not leave me with a proposition of marriage fresh on his lips to go to her."

"Have you any suggestion to make?" her father asked.

"No, I have thought of nothing. My heart was

filled with fury, and my one idea was to kill her somehow."

"Put such thoughts from you, Mildred. A plan suggests itself to me. He must suspect nothing of your discovery."

"I will not betray myself."

"Do you remember the bet you and I made this morning?"

"I remember no bet. What can it have to do with this matter?"

"Everything. You bet me that she would look like a guy in a silk dress in a drawing-room. Do you not remember now?"

"Yes; well?"

"Well, you must pretend to a willingness to test the bet. Say nothing to him of it, however, but come to the factory alone to-morrow, and let me introduce Goldie to you."

"I do not understand."

"You will presently. Be very kind to her, and invite her to come to see you. Get her here and worm everything out of her. I am sure she is not designing, as you think. If she is not, all you need do is to let her be a witness of a scene between you and Donald. Get him to admit that he is your promised husband. If I am not mistaken in the girl she will be willing to wed me that moment."

Mildred fixed her burning eyes on her father for a moment, then hissed :

"I will try your way; but I swear that if it does not succeed, I will take some other way of ridding myself of her."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PLOT AGAINST GOLDIE.

It was impossible for either Mildred or her father to comprehend the condition of Donald's mind.

He hardly comprehended it himself. All he was fully aware of was, that Goldie drew him to her as by a spell of enchantment, even while he was struggling with all his might to be true to the traditions of his race.

It was a fight of pride of blood against a mad, overpowering love. From his birth he had been taught to look down on all who belonged to Goldie's walk in life; and now he was like one bewitched.

It seemed to him like a madness; and he almost staggered and reeled like a drunken man when he left Goldie.

He asked himself what he should do. He had purposely asked Mildred to be his wife in order that he might have that safeguard against his passion for Goldie; and yet he had told Goldie of his love and had asked her to go to his Southern home with him.

He could not wed both of them; he could not deceive both. One he might wed, and one he might

deceive. He must wed Mildred. Should he deceive Goldie?

There was another way: He might wed Mildred and tell Goldie that it was all a mistake, and that she must give him up.

But there came a wrench at his heart when he contemplated that, and he knew he would never willingly give up the woman he loved with so furious a passion that it swept him out upon an unknown sea, in which he was tossed like a helpless bark in a tempest.

It flashed into his brain that there was yet one other way: He might go to Mildred and tell her that he had made a mistake, then wed Goldie.

But at that, his pride, which was like a fatal disease which was eating into his very soul, revolted. Wed a factory girl? Never!

He dared not, after that, face the truth of his own determination. And yet it rose up before him appallingly clear and distinct.

If he would not wed her, and would not give her up; if he would wed Mildred, and yet keep Goldie, there was but one conclusion: He must ruin, betray, deceive the trusting heart!

Ah! Satan must have laughed aloud when he witnessed the struggle in that proud breast.

Mildred and her father saw that he was perturbed,

but they could not fathom the depth of his agony; and he never suspected that they saw aught amiss in him.

The two betrothed ones went to the theatre that night, and each made a show of enjoying the play. Yet neither could have told of one thing that happened on the stage.

Each was rejoiced, too, when the ordeal of acting their own parts was over; and Mildred retired to her own room that night ready to tear the heart from the breast of the girl who had won the love of her fiancé.

The next morning she pleaded an engagement, and Donald, rejoiced to have his freedom, went away to his club, where he might smoke in solitude.

Almost instantly after his departure Mildred threw on her wraps, and stepped into the carriage which was waiting for her in front of the house.

She looked up at the great factory building when she stood in front of it at last with a proud scorn, and a wonder entered her brain how it was possible for a haughty Southerner like Donald to let his fancy wander to one who worked for a living.

She asked for her father, and was taken to his private office.

She knew she would meet her rival in a few moments, and she schooled herself to keep her face from betraying the bitter hatred that seethed in her heart.

"I will give her a chance for life," she muttered; "but I will destroy her ruthlessly if she does not accept it."

She had seen Goldie on the street when Donald was straining her to his breast; but even if her fury had not then blinded her, she would not have been able to judge of her beauty.

"I shall see what there is in her face that makes men go mad over her," she thought as she opened the door of the office and entered.

Mr. Selden was there, but the eyes of Mildred did not see him. They fell on the face of Goldie, and Mildred knew that she was the most wondrously beautiful creature in the world.

She knew that Donald would never cease to love the possessor of that face, and that there was nothing but death which could remove that obstacle from her path.

After her father had greeted her he said:

"By the way, Mildred, let me introduce to you my new secretary, Miss Goldie Mowbray. Goldie, this is my daughter, Miss Mildred."

Goldie rose shyly and bent her lovely golden head, and every movement of her rounded, graceful form sent a new and bitter pang to the heart of the proud girl.

"I am very glad to meet you," Goldie said modestly. "Your father has been too kind to me."

The musical, silvery voice was an added torment to the heart of Mildred, and if she had followed out her first impulse, she would have buried her jeweled fingers in the white throat, and would not have relaxed her hold until the sweet, seductive tones were stilled forever.

But she was forced to stifle her fury and smile as sweetly as she could at the innocent girl. She even took the little, dimpled hand in hers and murmured:

"Papa has mentioned you, Goldie, and I am glad to meet you. You are all his flattering words declared. Ah! you do not know what pleasant words he has spoken of you!"

Then Mildred could have stabbed her to the heart for the rosy blush that mounted to her round cheeks.

"I have done nothing to deserve his kindness," Goldie said in her embarrassment.

Mildred laughed.

"I do not know as to that, but it is evident you have the gift of making people love you. I, for example, have fallen a victim at first sight, and whether papa likes it or not, I am going to steal you away from here."

"What do you mean, Mildred?" her father demanded with pretended surprise.

"I mean that I am going to take Goldie home with me. You and Donald are away most of the time, and I want some one to talk to. Now, don't say no, Goldie, for I always have my own way. Papa! tell her it is useless to resist."

Mr. Selden laughed.

"That is true, little Goldie. Everybody obeys Mildred. So put on your hat and cloak and be gone."

"But I am not fit," pleaded Goldie, in consternation, and looked down at her neat but plain gown as she spoke.

"You are fit if I think so," insisted Mildred; and with her own hands she took down the street garments of the despised factory girl.

Indeed, now that she had seen Goldie, she would not for any earthly reward have let her escape her.

The bewitching beauty of the factory girl had madened her, and into her brain had crept a dark, terrible thought.

"Aye!" she murmured to herself, "you shall go with me, and I swear your beauty shall never charm the heart of Donald from me again. I swear that he shall turn from you with a shudder of horror."

"It seems so strange," pleaded Goldie.

Mildred laughed almost harshly.

"Why strange? Are you not yet used to making people love you? Ah! you should be. Come, little

Goldie! you shall tell me of your lovers as we sit together in my boudoir. Ha! ha! ha!"

Goldie shuddered as she listened, and in after days she wished with all the passion of her soul that she had not gone with Mildred Selden that day.

CHAPTER IX.

SOWING THE SEEDS OF DOUBT.

Goldie was not going to the house of Mildred Selden willingly, and yet there was a thrill of joy mingling with her unwillingness.

She knew that Donald was visiting at the Selden house, and that she would meet him there. It did not occur to her to ask herself if he would be pleased to meet her at the house of his friends. To her that was a matter of course.

Of course she knew very well that he was rich, while she was poor, and more than once she recalled the words of her mother concerning marriages of inequality, but it seemed easy to smile at the warning when Donald was her lover.

She could understand how it would be dangerous in other cases, but when the lover was like Donald, the very perfection of nobility, it was ridiculous to even think of it.

She took her place by the side of Mildred in the sumptuous carriage, whose cushions were so rich and luxurious, and sank back with a delight she could not suppress.

It was the first time she had ever ridden in so mag-

nificently appointed a vehicle, and she confessed to herself that it was very delightful.

"You enjoy riding," Mildred said, with an air of half inquiry.

"I have never ridden much," Goldie answered frankly.

"That is a treat that is in store for you then," Mildred said, showing her even white teeth in a way that somehow made Goldie think of a wolf, though she could not have told why.

"In store for me!" Goldie responded. "How do you mean?"

"Why," replied Mildred, her black eyes searching the face of her companion, "such a pretty girl as you will be sure to win a rich husband."

"I would not care for the riches of my lover," Goldie said quickly. "If I had his love, and he was the man of my heart, I would not care if he were the poorest man on earth."

Mildred bit her lip. Whether the words of the beautiful girl were true or false they were such as would be sure to win the heart of a man. For men like girls to be disinterested.

"Nonsense!" she sneered. "That will do very well for you to say, but it would be difficult to make me believe it. Of course you want a rich husband. And, what is more, you will marry one."

"I may marry a rich man," Goldie said with a conscious flush, "but it will not be because he is rich."

Mildred laughed, and patted the round arm patronizingly.

"Shall I tell you what I would do if I were you?" she asked.

"What would you do?"

"I suppose you are poor?"

"Yes, indeed; very poor. If I did not work I should starve."

Mildred's lip curled with scorn, but she turned her head so that Goldie should not see how she was affected. [It seemed strange to her that even Goldie's beauty could win a man's heart, when it was coupled with the fact that she worked for her daily bread.]

"Well," she said, "you know you are very beautiful. You do know that, do you not?"

Goldie grew as red as a peony.

Of course she knew it; but it was odd to be asked to admit it; but she was honest in everything.

"I have often been told I was pretty. I suppose I am to those who like my style. I think you are far more queenly and beautiful."

She spoke the truth in that; for she had often regretted she was not a brunette instead of a blonde.

"No doubt I am beautiful," Mildred answered carelessly; "but you are the kind of girl that men always

want to kiss and take in their arms. I don't know why; I only know it is so. Why, my father thinks you are the sweetest and most beautiful creature he ever saw."

The red color leaped to Goldie's cheeks.

"We talked about you at the table yesterday; and I remember he and Donald had a bet about you. But never mind about that. What I was going to say was that if I were you——"

A pang had shot to Goldie's heart at the story of a bet.

She did not know why she felt so uncomfortable over it, but she did; and when she could command herself she interrupted:

"What was the bet, please?"

"Oh, never mind that. Just one of those bets that men are always making about us women. I was going to say——"

"I would like to know what the bet was, please," insisted Goldie, her voice taking on a certain ring of firmness that showed of what stuff she was made.

Mildred looked at her with her teeth showing in that way which seemed so wolf-like to Goldie. It rejoiced her to see how the poison was working.

"Oh, well, if you must know, it was like this: Papa said you were so good and so beautiful. Of course I

laughed, and so did Donald, for papa is always telling us about one of his factory girls.

"Then papa grew warm over it, and declared he would bet Donald that you were the most beautiful girl in the world, and that Donald would no sooner see you than he would want to kiss and hug you."

The violet eyes grew big and wrathful. How had they dared to talk so of her?

"Then Donald laughed," Mildred went on, "and said no doubt he could kiss and hug you if he felt like it. Now don't be angry at that, for Donald is a Southern aristocrat, who thinks all women who are not of a certain social rank are hardly women at all."

"I cannot, will not, believe it," cried Goldie vehemently.

Mildred laughed heartily.

"Why, you silly child! you think because he saved your life that he is the very pink of perfection. Well, perhaps he is, but not in the way you think. Anyhow, he made the bet, and papa was so determined that he should not be rude to you that he made up his mind to take you into his office."

"Don—Mr. Irwin would never be rude to me. There is some mistake."

"I am glad to hear you say so," said Mildred suavely. "It assures me that Donald was only jesting when

he said he had won the bet. To tell you the truth I did not believe him."

It seemed to poor Goldie that the whole world was turning around.

Was it possible that she was hearing the truth from the lips of Mildred?

"You see," Mildred went on after enjoying the misery of her victim, "we Northerners are so different from Southerners about social rank. I could not bear that Donald should be under a false impression in regard to you. I told him you were as much a lady as I, but he laughed me to scorn, persisting that he had won his bet, which was a proof that you are not very particular. Now don't say a word, my dear; I know without your telling me that he has not kissed and hugged you; and that is one reason why I wanted you to come home with me."

"But," gasped the tortured girl, "I must speak—I must tell you——"

"Tell me nothing, my dear. Besides, we are home now, and you must not say anything more until we are in my boudoir, where we can talk with the utmost freedom."

She stepped out of the carriage, the door of which had been opened by the footman, and held her hand for Goldie to follow her.

The young girl felt as if she had been inhaling some

noxious atmosphere, and it was on her tongue to refuse to go into the house.

Then she reflected that she must do or say something to make clear the condition of affairs before she parted from Mildred, whom she could not like well enough to remain with.

"If what she says is true," she murmured to herself, "it is some jest of Donald's. He is preparing to let them into the whole secret in his own time. Why did I not think of that at first?"

The thought gave her renewed life, and she stepped lightly from the carriage and followed Mildred up the stoop.

The doubt of Donald's purity of intention had been most cunningly instilled into the mind of Goldie, but it had not yet accomplished its purpose, for Goldie's natural loyalty carried her in triumph out of the abyss of suspicion into which Mildred would have cast her.

She could not help wondering at the luxury that was displayed in the house, and it seemed more and more strange to her that the proud beauty had invited her there in so friendly a way.

The boudoir into which Mildred led Goldie seemed to be the very acme of luxury and lavish splendor.

Mildred threw herself on a divan and motioned to Goldie to make herself equally at home, while the maid removed and took away their street garments.

But the moment they were alone, Goldie rose to her feet, and said:

"Of course I am sorry there should have been such a bet; but I will not blame Mr. Irwin until he has had a chance to explain, in my presence, what he means by saying he has won his bet."

Mildred gritted her white teeth in her rage at these words, for she understood now that whatever intentions Donald might have toward Goldie, she at least believed in his purity and sincerity.

She had the presence of mind and the self-control to hide her emotion, however, and to say composedly:

"That is right. Besides, I want you to show him that I, too, spoke the truth when I said you would be able to don the most sumptuous garments and appear in them to as good an advantage as if you had been born in the purple."

"What do you mean?" demanded Goldie.

"I mean that I am going to have you put on some of my clothes to be presented to him in."

The violet eyes flashed, and the golden head went up with the gesture of a queen.

"That I will not consent to do," she said, emphatically. "I will meet Mr. Irwin, but it must be just as I am."

"What nonsense!" said Mildred scornfully. "Let me select some things that will suit you."

"No, I will not appear before him except in my own clothes. I will not wear borrowed plumage."

"Just as you please," and Mildred shrugged her shoulders, as if dismissing the matter from her thoughts. "Let us talk of something else! Shall it be our lovers?"

CHAPTER X.

THE BLOW FALLS.

Goldie could not comprehend then what it was in Mildred that made her select such subjects for her conversation. Not that there was anything singular in girls talking to each other of their lovers, for that was a common thing, as Goldie very well knew.

But somehow it did not seem as if Mildred would be one of the sort to talk of such things to a stranger, for, veil her feelings as she might, it was yet perfectly apparent to Goldie that her hostess was as proud and cold as an iceberg.

Why then had she gone to the factory to get Goldie for a companion with whom to discuss the subject of love and lovers?

Goldie looked at the dark beauty as she reclined with Oriental grace on the divan, and the instinct of bitter enmity between them troubled her.

She did not understand her own feelings, however, and therefore did not know how to act. She felt she must go away; and yet she remained because there yet remained the necessity of being put right before Mildred and her father by Donald.

"Have you ever had a lover?" asked Mildred languidly, as she turned her dark eyes on Goldie's face.

"Only one," Goldie answered shortly. It seemed to her that she could not discuss the subject with Mildred.

"Only one! dear me! I would have supposed you had had a dozen at the very least. Tell me about him."

"I would rather not," Goldie responded, in a low tone.

"Rather not! Oh! it was broken off, I suppose. I am sorry I spoke of it, then."

"It was not broken off," was the swift rejoinder. "He is still my lover, and I know he is as true to me as I am to him."

"Oh, how delightful! Was it a long courtship, or love at first sight? I do so love to hear of such affairs. Tell me all about it."

"I cannot do that. It was love at first sight. I will say no more about it. Please do not ask me to."

Mildred laughed in that strange, wolfish way of hers, and Goldie again felt a shudder run over her.

"I will be more communicative than you, Goldie. Did you know that I was engaged to be married?"

"No."

"Well, it is true, and I believe we love each other as much as ever two people did. Confess now, Goldie, that you did not think I would be one to love very devotedly."

"On the contrary, I would think you capable of a very fierce love."

Mildred rose on one elbow, and her eyes seemed fairly lurid as she gazed at Goldie.

"That is true; I do love him so fiercely that if I thought him untrue to me, I could kill him rather than let another have him."

Goldie recoiled before the light in those black eyes.

"And yet," Mildred said with a low laugh, "I am not what you would call a jealous sweetheart. I let him have his liberty."

"I should not suppose he would care for any liberty if he loved you."

"I don't know; men don't like to be hampered too much. I let my lover do as he pleases, as long as I know he loves me. And he does love me, Goldie. Ah, it is so sweet to be loved; is it not, dear?"

"It is the greatest joy of this earth," was the low response.

Mildred gritted her teeth, and could have driven a blade deep into the heart of her companion. But she knew she would yet torture her beyond all expression.

So she went on in a low, velvety tone that seemed strangely like the purring of a tigress over her prey:

"Yes, to be loved is a heavenly joy. Sometimes when I am held close to his throbbing breast, and his warm kisses are raining on my ready lips, it seems to

me that I never can be nearer heaven than then. Do you know what that bliss is, Goldie?"

Goldie stared wonderingly at her.

Mildred's face was working with a passion of love and longing as she described, not what had happened, but what she would give the world to have happen.

"I know the happiness of being in my lover's arms," Goldie answered in a low tone.

"And when he breathes burning words of love and devotion in my ear," Mildred continued, "it seems to me I could die so, rather than live in any other way. Ah! I love him, and he loves me. Is it not the sweetest boon of life to be sure of your lover, Goldie?"

"It would be worse than death not to be sure," Goldie whispered, her eyes big with wonder.

"Then you are sure of him?"

"As I am of Heaven. I would rather die than doubt," Goldie responded, her eyes becoming suddenly luminous.

"Ah! then you *do* know what love is, little Goldie. I, too, would rather die than doubt; but it is impossible for me to doubt. But what would you do if ever you discovered that your lover was untrue to you?"

"I do not know. I have not thought of that. I do not believe that can happen. Strange things may happen, but that I shall lose his love cannot happen because we were intended for each other by fate. Fate

brought us together, and on the instant that we met we knew that we loved."

She could have gone on; but stopped suddenly with the feeling that the ears that listened were not sympathetic, no matter how eagerly they drank in her words.

"I do not believe my lover could be untrue," Mildred said, slowly, as she sank back upon the divan again; "but I know what I would do if he were. I would kill him or her—perhaps both."

Goldie recoiled.

"Of what use would that be? You could not win his love back, and what would be the use of violence if it did not effect your purpose? For my part, it seems to me that I would wish for death to come to me if my lover were untrue. But he will not be."

How her calm assurance of the fidelity of Donald tortured Mildred.

"I like your certainty," she murmured; "it shows how dearly you love him."

"I love him with all my heart and soul. I give him everything of love there is in my nature."

"Ah! how glad I am that we have met, Goldie, for I see that we can understand each other. There are so many who cannot comprehend such an all-absorbing passion. I tell Donald sometimes that perhaps I shall be punished for loving him so wholly."

Goldie started back as if she had been struck in the face.

"Donald!" she gasped.

"Did I not tell you?" queried Mildred, watching her victim out of the corner of her eyes. "Donald is my love."

"Donald! Donald who?" gasped Goldie, trying to assure herself that she was crazed to think for an instant that it could be Donald Irwin.

"Donald who?" laughed Mildred. "Well, no doubt there is more than one Donald in the world; but I had never thought of it. I mean Donald Irwin."

"Don—Donald Irwin!" gasped Goldie, reeling in her seat, then plucking up heart and laughing scornfully. "You do not of course mean he who saved my life?"

"Indeed I do. Have you such a noble lover as he? But of course you will contend that your lover is the best man in the world. I suppose that is natural; but it does seem as if it would be hard for anyone to dispute that my Donald is the handsomest and noblest man in all the world."

Goldie sat gasping as if in mortal pain. Her head seemed to be going round and round.

Still she clung to the idea that there was some mistake.

"He—he is very—very handsome. You—you are sure that—that he is your lover?"

Mildred laughed shrilly as if at a stupendous joke.

"Am I sure? Well, that is funny. Well, anyhow, we are engaged, and he declares that he loves me better than all the world. And he is anxious to hasten the wedding. I suppose that is some sort of proof."

"You—you are to be—be married?" gasped Goldie.

"I hope so, indeed," laughed Mildred. "I would not be engaged to him otherwise. What odd questions to ask! Do you not intend to marry your lover, I should like to know?"

Goldie tottered to her feet, and with a sort of moan cried out:

"Am I alive? Is this true? Oh, Heaven, let me understand this!"

"Why, Goldie," cried Mildred, feasting her eyes on the misery of the other, "what is the matter? Why do you take on so. Have I said anything to disturb you?"

Goldie did not make any response. Her little hands were held tightly to her forehead, as if she would restrain the thoughts that whirled in there.

What had happened? Was it true that Donald was engaged to marry Mildred Selden? Or could it be that she had only dreamed it?

She turned her strained and agonized eyes on Mildred and demanded in a low, intense tone:

"Did—did you say that you were engaged to Donald Irwin?"

"Certainly I said so. Why do you act so strangely? Are you ill, Goldie? Why do you ask me so many times over?"

Goldie stared at her, and as she gazed into the sable orbs her distrust awakened, and her anguish urged her to cry out:

"You are only deceiving me. It is not true that you are engaged to him; I know it is not true. I was mad to believe you."

Then Mildred rose from her reclining posture, and in a cold, incisive tone said:

"I think you are mad; I do not understand you at all. Donald Irwin is my lover, and he has asked me to be his wife. Why should you doubt it? What right have you to say such a thing to me? I did not tell you you were not going to wed your lover. What do you mean?"

Goldie stared at her hard and long, like one in a maze of doubt. Then she recalled her words to Donald that she would always believe in him, and she said:

"I mean that he cannot be your lover and mine, too; and he is my lover."

CHAPTER XL.

A DAY OF TORTURE.

There was a moment then, when the life of Goldie Mowbray hung by but a thread.

Her words had been expected, indeed; but there was something so proud and assured in the utterance of them as drove Mildred almost out of her senses.

A strangled cry of rage rushed from her livid lips, and with a panther-like movement she glided to her writing-desk where a glistening stiletto was hidden.

She had but to snatch that forth and leap on the beautiful girl who had dared to tell her that Donald was her lover, and she no longer would be an obstacle in her path.

But reason asserted itself in time; and she hid her purpose in stealing to the desk, by resting her hand on it as if for support, and saying in a surprised tone:

"Goldie, my dear! you are not well. How could your words be true? When did you first see Donald Irwin?"

"I saw him yesterday for the first time; but it is none the less true that he loves me, and wishes to wed me."

"Are you serious?" demanded Mildred in a hard tone.

"I am stating the simple fact," Goldie answered as calmly as she could.

Mildred eyed her with a malevolent look. She was not yet through with her torture. She had thrust the knife into her victim's heart, but the agony must be augmented by turning the blade with a merciless hand.

"And he is the lover you have told me of?" Mildred asked, letting her contempt show in her tone.

"He is the lover."

"My poor girl! Now I understand. Can you not see, my poor little Goldie, that he was only winning his bet? Did you really let a man you had seen but once press kisses on your lips, take you in his arms?"

Goldie's face was white to the lips. She was suffering horribly, but she was brave to trust to the end. "If you choose to put it that way," she answered, "yes. I loved him and he me, so I let him do as he would, and was glad."

"Then I must pay the debt. Oh, Goldie, I am sorry for you."

"I do not ask your sympathy. Perhaps it were better that I offered mine to you. I tell you he loves me. I could not be deceived. I know he loves me. He cannot love you."

Mildred could have torn Goldie's tongue out by the roots.

"What is love without marriage?" she asked with a sneer that cut to the heart.

"It is sin," answered Goldie swiftly, her head erect and her eyes flaming. "It is sin, but Donald would never shame himself or insult me with even the thought of it."

"And yet he has asked me to be his wife," Mildred said pitilessly.

Goldie's lip curled with scorn. Her courage began to return to her.

"And he has asked me to accept his love. That means marriage when an honorable man asks it. Donald is an honorable man."

"He cannot marry us both," Mildred hissed.

"I suppose he will choose where his heart is," Goldie retorted. "I know he loves me."

"Donald Irwin wed a factory girl! You are mad, poor little Goldie!"

"Mad with the joy of his love, perhaps," was the answer.

"I can prove that I am his choice," Mildred said in a low tone.

The calmness of the other was almost more than she could bear.

"I do not believe it."

"Will you believe the evidence of your eyes and ears?"

"I will believe Donald, though it killed me; but I will not believe you."

Mildred laughed.

"Remain in this house until Donald comes, then, and you shall hear from his own lips that I am his affianced wife. And you shall hear, too, what he thinks of you. Poor little Goldie! I am sorry for you."

"I scorn your sympathy."

"When I told you," jeered Mildred, "to choose a rich husband, I only meant to barter your beauty for an old man's wealth. It is still my advice. But, as for such as Donald—why, my dear, you are crazy to hope for such a thing. He considers himself far—far above you."

"Where shall I remain while I wait? It must be where I need not listen to you. And understand that I wait not so much to satisfy myself as to prove my confidence in him. I know he loves me."

"You shall have a room across the hall. Sit there and watch when he comes home; then steal down the stairs after me and listen to his words, see what he does. You have my permission. But I must beg of you not to make a scene. It would be so unpleasant."

Goldie did not deign an answer, but opened the

door and went to the room across the hall, and there sat down to wait.

She was sure in her heart that Donald loved her, and that she risked nothing in waiting for him to come; and yet, why that strange oppression around her brain?

And what did it all mean? How much was false and how much true of what had happened to her since she had left the factory with the beautiful girl, who claimed Donald for her own?

It was plain to her, though she could not tell why, that Mildred was false. But if she were false why would she dare to risk having her interview with Donald spied upon?

Goldie knew that Donald was rich and she poor, but she was sure he was too noble to let that weigh with him. He would be certain to know that his money was nothing to her.

Now and again the thought would offer itself that it might be true that he had only thought of her as one to love, not to wed. But death was preferable to that idea, and she drove it from her as she would a hideous thing.

How the time passed that day she did not know, nor how long it was she waited. She knew that sometimes she paced the room like a condemned criminal, and that sometimes she sat like one in a stupor.

She remembered she was asked by Mildred to go down to luncheon and that she had refused, after which a tray full of things had been brought up to her.

She recalled afterward that she did not touch a thing that was on the tray, and that her feeling had been that a mouthful of food in that house would choke her.

How distinctly, too, it came back to her in after days that she had listened to the singing of Mildred with an awful feeling of hate and repulsion in her heart.

She could have strangled her for daring to sing the gay songs, when the dread was growing in her own heart, though she tried so hard to fight it down, until at last she had heard a ring at the doorbell, and had stolen to the door to listen.

The door opposite had been left open, too, and as Goldie looked forth with her white face, she looked into the sneering countenance of Mildred.

"It is he, my Donald," Mildred said.

Goldie did not answer because she was afraid to.

Mildred seemed to read her thoughts as if they had been spread out on a printed page.

"You know he is going to prove me right," she hissed across the hall.

Still Goldie only looked steadfastly into her eyes,

as if she would read there the explanation of what was racking her soul.

"He will go into the library to smoke a cigar," Mildred said. "You see I know his habits; in a moment I shall go down, and you shall follow. Then you need only listen and look, too, if you will—for I shall leave the door open on purpose—and you shall learn that he intends to wed me, though it may be that he loves you a little. I admit you are the sort men like to kiss and caress."

Still Goldie did not speak. If she had tried to do so, she knew that her voice would rise to a wail of anguish.

It was as if something within her was telling her that she would surely know a terrible woe within that hour.

She tried hard not to doubt as she waited while Mildred put a last touch to her toilet, which she had made as charming as possible.

Then, at last, Mildred swept forth and with a sneer for Goldie, glided down the polished stairs.

The young girl glided softly yet swiftly, with a mechanical movement, after her.

CHAPTER XII.

WHAT GOLDIE SAW AND HEARD.

It had been a day of fierce unrest and dissatisfaction to Donald. He had gone to the club, and from there had wandered to first one place and then another, until he had exhausted all the places he could think of.

He was battling now with his pride and now with his heart. Ah! if he had only understood himself better!

He truly loved Goldie, but he fancied when he was away from her that he was only the victim of a strange infatuation.

What puzzled him was that he should be in love with one so far beneath him in station. He had been taught that from his cradle up, and he was shocked with himself.

The worst of it was, in his eyes, that he could not put the winsome face with its large, loving, violet eyes out of his mind.

He kept seeing them all day, and in spite of everything he continually found himself looking forward to the time when he would meet her again.

He had left her the previous night with the understanding that they would meet again when she was dismissed from her work.

But with a dogged determination to let his intellect govern him in spite of the longing of his heart, he went during the afternoon and purchased a diamond ring at Tiffany's.

"I will give this to Mildred!" he said fiercely.

The time was to come when he would look back at those hours as if they had been passed in madness; but he could not see it so then.

He was conscious enough that he was suffering; but he kept blaming himself for that, as if it somehow were a fault of his own which he was to correct in himself.

Still it made no difference what conclusion he came to. In any case he saw himself to blame. He was either treating Mildred or Goldie shamefully.

But he clung tenaciously to the idea that his only course was to wed Mildred, no matter how passionately his heart clung to Goldie.

At last it resolved itself down into a determination to settle the matter with Mildred by taking her the ring.

The library door opened suddenly, and he looked up. It was Mildred who had come bustling in with a bright smile on her lips.

"Oh!" she cried with a little start of surprise, "I did not know you were here."

She spoke so low that no one out of the room could hear. He answered in a subdued tone.

"I have just come in."

Mildred approached nearer to him, conscious with a wicked joy, that there was a pair of burning eyes, of anguished ears, without.

He looked up at her as if to divine her thoughts. She smiled sweetly and stood before him. As plainly as eyes could say it, she begged him to kiss her.

The ring of betrothal was in his pocket. Why should he not give her the token of affection she craved, even though he almost loathed her at the thought of doing it?

"Mildred! my dear!" he said, rising to his feet.

She inclined her head and he pressed a cold, unloving kiss on her brow. But it was a kiss, and the wretched creature in the hall could not guess how little of love went into it.

Goldie, with stilled heart and bloodless face stood, like a thief in the night, listening and looking. And already the blow had fallen on her heart.

"My darling Donald!" Mildred said, in tones that pierced the brain of the listener.

"Mildred," said Donald with an effort, as he thrust his hand into his pocket, "I have brought you a ring, so that our engagement may be formally completed.

I do not know that it will fit you, but if not it can easily be changed."

He produced the ring and gave it to her. She noticed that his head was almost averted as he did so; but Goldie only saw the ring given, and heard the words which made further doubt impossible.

"What a beautiful diamond!" Mildred cried. "And the ring fits perfectly! Ah! the eyes of love are keen."

He might have told her that it was the advice of the salesman to take that size, but what was the use?

"Does it not look well, Donald?" she went on.

There was a rustling of skirts in the hall, and then the shutting of the door.

"What was that?" he asked, singularly moved.

Mildred's eyes glistened with a fierce joy and triumph. She could have told him that that noise was caused by the anguished flight of the one woman in the world that his heart craved for.

"One of the servants went out," she said, carelessly; though she turned her head, lest he should see and wonder at her exultant expression.

"I felt as they say we feel when some one walks over the spot where we are to be buried," he muttered.

And little wonder that he had such a feeling in his heart; for in the soul of Goldie was such a misery and woe as might well have sent a corresponding thrill to his.

She had listened and looked, and there could be no doubt that the one thing in the world she most feared was true—Donald was untrue to her.

And if this much was true, if he really was the betrothed husband of Mildred Selden, was it not likely that he had but duped her in everything?

Must it not be true that he had told her he loved her, only that he might win his bet that she would let him kiss her and take her in his arms?

How horrible! how worse than death that thought was, and she could not even buoy herself up with the hope that it might prove untrue, for she now knew enough to satisfy her that anything might be true.

She stood transfixed with horror for a brief moment, and then tottered to the door, which she opened, and darted through.

She did not know where she was going; did not care. If she could have the assurance that she was going to her grave, she would have hailed the news with wild joy.

The one thing she wished then was to get far away from that house, where lay buried the dead hopes of her torn and bleeding heart.

The door slammed shut behind her, and, heedless of where she went, she dashed down the stoop, and would have darted wildly up the street but for a restraining hand that was laid on her arm.

"Why, Goldie, what is the matter?"

She stared at the speaker, and saw as through a haze that it was Mr. Selden who spoke to her.

"Let me go!" she cried, wildly. "Let me go!"

She tried to throw his hand off, but he clung to her and said:

"Something has happened, Goldie. I do not understand it; but if you will not return to the house, at least you must get into my carriage and let me take you home. You are not fit to go thus. Why, you have not even your hat and cloak on."

"Anywhere but there," she panted. "Take me home. Do not stop for anything, but take me if you will not let me go as I am."

He handed her into the carriage and followed her, telling the driver where to go to.

And when the carriage was in motion, he took one of Goldie's hands in his and began to talk gently and soothingly to her.

She did not even know that he held her hand; and it was some time before she was conscious of what he was saying to her.

"You do not hear me," he said petulantly.

In fact he was annoyed because he had been approaching the subject of his expectations in regard to her, and had been at first flattered by her silence.

"I beg your pardon," she said dully. "I did not know you were talking to me."

"Tell me what happened to make you so disturbed," he said.

She looked into his face for a moment, and then said in a heavy voice:

"I thought Donald Irwin loved me, and he doesn't. That is all."

There was a world of woe in the simple words; but Mr. Selden was too intent on his object to give much thought to such matters.

"Donald Irwin!" he repeated with brutal frankness, "Donald Irwin loves my daughter Mildred, and will marry her. He is far too proud and haughty to look as low as a factory girl. How could you have got such a notion in your head?"

A wild laugh broke from her lips.

"He put it there. He told me he loved me, and I believed it because I loved him. What a fool I was!"

"It was wrong of Donald to do that, but he always was wild in that way. You see those Southerners do not look at labor as we of the North do."

"Why did he not let me die?" she moaned.

"You are far too beautiful to die. Goldie, would you be revenged on him for such a slight?"

"I wish no revenge. I would not injure him if I could do it by a turn of the wrist."

"Do you wish him to know that your heart is broken?"

"Why should it matter to me?" she wailed.

"Will you let him tell at the club how he fooled you and broke your heart?"

"Would he do that?"

"Of course he would."

"Then he is more despicable than I believed. Would he really do it?"

"If you let him know that your heart is broken because you discovered that he did not mean to wed you. May I advise you?"

"I have no friends. What do you advise? For my own part, I wish it was all over."

"What you should do is to prove your ability to rise above his deceit by wedding some man as good as he."

"How? I do not understand."

"Marry me, little Goldie! I will make you happier than he could have done. When Mildred is his wife you shall be mistress of my house, with money and servants at your command. Will you marry me, Goldie?"

She stared at him in wonder. Then the blood seemed to rush to her head, and all she remembered was that she put her hand in his, and said:

"I will be your wife, but I shall always love him."

CHAPTER XIII.

A STRANGE WEDDING.

A suspicion of the truth in regard to Goldie flashed into the mind of Mr. Selden. He saw that she was almost crazed by her terrible grief, and that she hardly knew what she was doing.

She had said she would marry him, but when the sun of another day arose would she remember what she had said, and act on it?

Mr. Selden had conceived a violent passion for the beautiful girl, and he recalled as he sat by her side in the carriage how desperate he had felt when he was told that she and Donald were lovers.

"She shall wed me now," he thought to himself. "She is in a mood to do anything I ask."

The carriage rumbled on, and Goldie sat staring fixedly before her. Mr. Selden, who still held her passive hand, said softly:

"Goldie, dear! Goldie! are you listening to me?"

"Yes, I am listening."

It seemed that she was, but it was hard to believe that she heard and comprehended.

"I wish to have you do something."

"I wish only to be let alone," she answered dully.

"If you will do what I ask there will be no one to trouble you, Goldie."

"I will do anything you wish me to."

"I was thinking what a triumph over Donald it would be to go to a clergyman now and have him marry us."

She turned her head slowly and looked at him.

"Why won't you believe me? I don't wish to triumph over him."

"Will you marry me to please me, then?" he asked desperately.

"I will do anything you wish."

He was afraid her mind was unhinged, and he looked anxiously at her. She was dull and staring, but otherwise seemed herself.

Mr. Selden instructed the coachman to drive to an address which he gave him, and when the carriage stopped he said:

"We are here, Goldie."

"Where?"

"At the clergyman's, where we are to be married."

She looked at him for a moment as if trying to comprehend, and then said abruptly:

"Very well."

She seemed a strange figure for the bride of Mr. Selden, the millionaire, but when the clergyman

opened his eyes in surprise and looked askance at her, Mr. Selden said sharply:

"There is nothing wrong about this. Miss Mowbray is in some distress of mind and came away without her wraps. Will you be good enough to marry us?"

The clergyman knew Mr. Selden well, and therefore did not hesitate, however odd it seemed to him to marry him to a bride of such singular beauty, but in a shabby gown, hatless and coatless.

He asked Goldie the usual questions about her age, her parents, her guardians and her readiness to marry Mr. Selden.

She answered rationally enough, but in a dull, uninterested way that was painful to see in one so young.

Then the clergyman called his wife and daughter in, and had them act as witnesses, while he joined the strangely assorted couple in the bonds of matrimony.

It was an impressive ceremony from its singularity, and ever afterward the members of the clergyman's family spoke of it with wonder and awe.

But it was only among themselves that they ever did so, for when the ceremony was concluded, Mr. Selden drew out a roll of bills and gave the most liberal fee the clergyman ever had had.

"Send a notice to the papers," Mr. Selden whis-

pered, "but do not gossip about the details of this wedding."

The clergyman's daughter went up to Goldie, whose wonderful beauty attracted her, and pressed a kiss on her cheek.

Goldie accepted the caress and the murmured congratulation with cold indifference that made the girl think more of a dead person than a living one.

"Come, dear," Mr. Selden said, holding out his hand to her.

She put her little hand in his, and was going out when the clergyman said politely:

"Good evening, Mrs. Selden!"

Then she stopped and stared at him with a puzzled frown.

"Is that my name now?" she asked of her husband.

"Yes, of course," he stammered. "Come, dear, we will go home now."

She made no opposition, and offered no comment afterward when they were in the carriage, and he called her all the endearing names he could think of.

But when he tried to take her in his arms, she stopped him with a shudder, which showed that she had not become entirely numbed.

"Please do not," she said.

He desisted, ready to humor her in everything. But

he was disturbed by her condition, and tried to rouse her from it.

"Do you know where we are going?" he asked her.

"Home."

"My home, you know," he said. "You will be mistress there now."

She made him no answer, and he ventured:

"We shall see Donald and Mildred there."

She shuddered, but that was the only way by which he knew she had heard him.

He was prepared for almost any scene when the house was reached. He knew it would be almost dinner-time when they got to the house, and he wondered how to proceed to have the least excitement.

He could think of no way, but to go at once into the library with his bride, and send word by a servant that he wished Donald and Mildred to join him there.

Goldie followed him passively into the house, and past the gaping servant, toward the library.

"Where are Miss Mildred and Mr. Irwin?" Mr. Selden asked.

"In the library, sir."

They had not separated yet, but had remained in desultory conversation since the departure of Goldie.

Mr. Selden placed the little hand of Goldie within his arm and walked with her thus into the library, his head erect, and his whole manner declaring that he

was prepared to maintain his rights and those of his wife in the face of any and everything.

Mildred and Donald had heard the door open, and had heard his voice, so they were prepared for his coming; but when they looked around and saw who was on his arm, they both started.

Mildred came nearer to the truth in her guess than Donald did, but even she was not prepared to hear the truth when it came.

Donald had a singular mingling of emotions. His first was one of fear of the consequences of such a meeting; his next, one of almost eager hope that somehow he would be extricated from a position which grew more and more intolerable to him every moment.

"Goldie!" broke from his lips almost before he knew what he was saying, and he could feel his heart begin to throb with the same passion which had carried him so far the previous evening.

Mildred only looked and waited, on guard against any surprise.

Mr. Selden gazed at them both for a moment, and then, with a courtly air, presented Goldie.

"Mildred! Mr. Irwin! let me present my wife to you."

"Your wife!" came in a gasping cry from both pair of lips.

"My wife. We were married this evening. It was

more informal than I would have wished ; but it seemed best."

"Goldie!" again came from the dry, parched lips of Donald.

If a thunderbolt had fallen at his feet he could not have been more startled. Her lips did not open, but her eyes dwelt on his face with a look he could not comprehend.

But this at last he did know: that he had lost what was the dearest thing in all the world to him. He knew now that he had loved her well enough to break down even the stubborn barriers of his pride.

And it was too late. He had lost her! She was the bride of that old man, who had bought her. His unreasonable anger flamed up as he thought of it.

"Why did you marry him, Goldie?" he demanded fiercely.

It was Mr. Selden who answered him. On her face there was nothing but such a look of agony as Donald never forgot.

"By what right do you address such a question to my wife?"

The demand brought Donald to his senses, but did not check his anger. He turned wrathfully on his host and cried out:

"How can I help asking it of her! She knows what

right I have to put it if you do not. And I ask it again: Why did you marry him?"

Goldie raised her hand and pointed at Mildred.

"There is your affianced wife. Me you deceived—basely, cruelly. It was infamous to awake within me such a love only to murder it. How dared you trifle with me so? Why did I wed him? I do not know. Please God it is the beginning of the end."

There was something terrible in her calmness, for it was the calmness of utter despair and woe. Life was a useless thing to her henceforth.

And Donald saw that he had lost everything; he saw that she had discovered his seeming double-dealing, and had given up with broken heart.

"Goldie! Goldie!" he cried in his anguish, "hear me!"

But she raised her little hand and passed from the room.

CHAPTER XIV.

A DESPERATE WOMAN.

Mr. Selden followed Goldie with a parting gesture of anger at Donald. And the betrothed pair was alone again.

Donald started, however, to follow Goldie, as if he could not make up his mind to give her up. Mildred put her hand on his arm, saying:

"Let them go! she has been angling for papa for a good while, and has won him at last."

He turned his burning gaze on her, and cried furiously:

"It is false! She cares nothing for him. She is my love—my Heaven-sent love, whom I was insane enough to turn from. I love her; do you understand me? I do not love you, but only her. And she loves me. The marriage is a sacrilege. Oh! it cannot be that I have lost her."

"Donald!" pleaded Mildred, placing her hand on his arm.

He shook her hand off. Yet he saw it was useless to make a scene. It was too late to remedy what had been done, and he could only curse himself.

"Donald, dear!" Mildred said again, her voice full of pleading.

He turned and looked at her for a moment as if he would first collect his senses. Then he spoke:

"Mildred, I have been a base wretch and a fool—worse than a fool. I met Goldie, and fate was working a miracle. We loved each other as it is seldom the case. We loved at once. But I was filled with a foolish pride that said she was only a working girl, and not a fit mate for me."

"She is not fit, Donald."

"Not fit? Only because she is too good for such as I. I turned from her, though it broke my heart to do it, and in a moment of madness I asked you to be my wife. Mildred, I can never wed you. I should hate you if I did make you my wife. I shall bid you farewell forever, now."

"No, no, Donald! Do not go from me, dear. I love you, and it is right that you should wed me now. See! here is the ring you gave me. It is a pledge of your readiness to make me your wife."

"Would you have me hate you?" he asked fiercely.

"You would not hate me. I would teach you to love me. Such a love as mine always wins a return. Donald, do not break my heart."

"I will not wed you. I would not dare. Farewell."

She caught him by the arm, but he shook off her hand, seized his hat and coat and hurried from the house.

"He is gone forever!" Mildred wailed.

Then fury took possession of her, and she shook her clinched hands at the ceiling, hissing:

"It is your fault! But you shall not live to triumph over me. I will end your life!"

Up to her own apartments the infuriated and reckless girl flew. She locked herself in, and began to hunt through the drawers of her desk until she had found a small key, with which she ran to a closet.

From the upper shelf she took down a small ebony casket, which she opened by the key she had in her hand.

Three tiny vials lay in a nest of silk within the casket. She took them up in turn and looked at the numbers which distinguished them from each other.

She hesitated between them for a while, but selected one at last and put the others away, muttering:

"This will arouse the least suspicion. It will seem so like apoplexy that no physician will doubt."

Her face was pale as she spoke, but her hand did not tremble as it held the crystal vial with its terrible contents.

"When she is dead," she went on, "he will return to me. Now let me go down and wait for the happy pair."

She sneered bitterly as she spoke, and her heart was wrung with disappointment and rage. She waited in

the drawing-room until she was joined by her father, who came down alone.

"Where is Goldie, my lovely stepmother?"

"She is indisposed," was the curt response. "She will not be down to dinner."

Mildred bit her lip to hide her disappointment.

"She begins to play the fine lady at once," she sneered.

Her father turned upon her.

"Don't make any mistake, Mildred! She shall play the fine lady if she wishes. She is mistress here."

"Don't be cross! I am willing she should be mistress. I shall not dispute the title with her."

"How soon will you be married?" he asked.

Her face became convulsed.

"Donald has left me. He said he would never marry me. Never mind him. Let us go to dinner. Will Goldie have something sent up to her?"

"I will take something up when I go. She said she would eat nothing."

Mildred set her jaws.

"Well, she must not get sick right away. Don't think I bear her any ill-will. You did what you could to help me. It is my own fault if my plans miscarried. I am glad if you have succeeded. When we are through dinner, I will fix her up a dainty meal. You need not tell her I did it, and she may eat it."

Mr. Selden thanked her gratefully. He was touched by kindness in a quarter whence he had looked only for harshness.

"Perhaps," he said, "your affair will turn out better than you think. I will do anything I can."

"Thank you. I don't believe there is anything to be done yet. Perhaps with time it will be different."

"Time is good medicine for many ills," he assented; and they went together to the dining room.

Very little was said during the meal. When it was over Mildred told the servants what to bring her, and with her own hands she arranged a dainty trayful of tempting dishes.

"I suppose she is feeling very melancholy," Mildred said to her father.

"To tell you the truth, yes."

"Why not send her up a glass of sherry? It will do her good if her nerves are unstrung."

"Thank you very much, Mildred! I shall not forget your kindness. Where is the sherry? Oh! there it is! Let me get it for you."

He brought her the decanter and she prepared to pour out a glassful.

"Oh, by the way!" she exclaimed, as if remembering something, "will you get that salt-cellar?"

He turned his back for a moment, and quick as

thought she had poured half the contents of the vial into the glass.

Mildred poured the wine out, and her hand shook as she did so, but she spilled none.

"The tray is ready, papa," she said. "I hope Goldie will not be ill for long. If you think she will receive it from me, tell her I shall be glad to see her down again."

"I will tell her how kind you have been, and that will dispose her to forgive you anything. She is a gentle little thing."

"And very beautiful, too," said Mildred.

"Yes, even now. When she is well, and has some new clothes, will she not be a queen in society? I wonder what the comments will be?"

Mildred smiled nervously.

"I suppose the men will envy you, and the women are sure to envy her. In that case you will both be abused."

He smiled and left the room. Mildred turned and grasped the mantel for support.

"Within the hour!" she murmured, and glided from the room, and sought refuge in her own apartments.

There she waited with ghastly face and trembling limbs, muttering now and again:

"Why did she cross my path?"

Suddenly a moaning cry came from her father's apartments, and she started up with convulsed face.

The cry was followed by a strange, horrid call for help, and then there was a sound of something falling.

Beads of cold perspiration stood on the white forehead of Mildred. She wiped them away and rushed out into the hall.

CHAPTER XV.

A WIDOWED BRIDE.

It is not venturing too much to say that Goldie was unaware of half of what she was doing that terrible night. The knowledge of the unfaithfulness of the man she had given her heart to had not driven her mad, but had unquestionably thrown her into a state wherein she was conscious only of the desire to rid herself of the terrible pain in her heart.

She was not her own mistress in one sense, although she knew that she was doing things that were horrible to her. Something told her that she could punish Donald by wedding Mr. Selden, and with passionate haste she did that thing.

Then she had confronted her recreant lover, and without knowing it, she had made him see into his own heart, and he had realized his loss in the very moment of discovering his true nature.

She had driven him away with a heart no less sore and battered than her own, and had then flown to the privacy of the room to which her aged husband had conducted her.

She had thrown herself on a couch, and it had seemed to her that if she were not left to her own thoughts she would surely go mad.

Though when she reflected on the wreck of her happiness, she wished that death, not madness, might be her portion.

She wondered how Heaven could have permitted such a thing, but there was something in her heart which would not let her curse the man who had stolen from her her happiness, but it was impossible for her to doubt that he was as guilty as the wily Mildred had assured her.

Then she thought of her marriage. What a hideous mockery it was.

She had promised things which she could never do. She hardly knew the man whose name she had taken.

She leaped wildly to her feet as she thought of this, and at that moment if Mildred had come to her with the glass of poisoned wine, and had told her the nature of its contents, she would have snatched it eagerly from her hand, that she might drain it to the dregs, and so rid her consciousness of the awful fact that she had lost her love, and had given herself to one she could never look upon but with a shudder of horror.

What did it matter to her if her husband was ever so good and noble a man? He might be the best man in the world, and yet she must in time hate him.

She clasped her hands together and stared up at heaven as if silently praying for guidance. Then a

moan broke from her lips as if she had suddenly realized that there could come no help to her.

Then the thought of flight entered her brain. She might fly from him and go to some far corner of the earth where he could never find her. Perhaps a welcome death would overtake her in the midst of her misery. She even thought of a way of hastening death.

She remembered reading in the papers of more than one unfortunate who had found refuge in the dark and flowing river.

A shudder of fright and horror ran over her as she thought of that, for she remembered now that in the times when she had read of such poor creatures, she had always said that they must either be mad or wicked.

Was she mad? Was she wicked? She asked herself these questions, and as she looked wildly up, she caught a reflection of herself in a mirror.

The face of woe and misery she saw, made her start back with a cry of terror, and throw herself once more on the couch which she had quitted.

And there she lay when Mr. Selden returned to her to offer her some food, which he was sure she needed.

He was sorry for her, and was quite ready to champion her against his daughter, now that he was wedded

to her. But it was utterly impossible for him to understand how she felt.

It was true that she had lost a lover, but in his view of the matter she had done better than if she had won Donald.

He had gained the impression from Mildred that any girl would be glad to win a rich husband, and he forgot that it was possible for a true-hearted woman to prefer love to wealth.

So he looked upon Goldie's grief as a thing which would soon pass away, and leave her quite content as his bride.

Another man, believing as he did, might have been harsh or impatient; but Mr. Selden had been bewitched by the wondrous beauty of Goldie, and had no thought of being anything but kind and gentle.

"Goldie, my dear," he said as he entered the room, "I have brought you some supper."

It seemed to her that she would choke if she tried to eat. She waved her hand as if to beg him to take the food away again.

"Oh, come, my dear," he said coaxingly as he went over toward her, "at least take a glass of wine. It will do you good."

"Oh, no, no!" she murmured, "I cannot eat or touch anything."

"But you will be ill," he protested.

"No, no; I could not eat anything."

"And you will not drink the wine—for my sake, Goldie?"

"I could not touch it," she moaned.

She did not even turn toward him as she spoke. It seemed to her that she must hate him if she looked at him.

Her heart told her that it would be most unjust to have any but kindly feelings toward him; but she could not get rid of the idea, which had flashed into her brain as she lay there, that he had taken advantage of her misery to get her to wed him.

"Come!" he said, drawing a little table over toward the couch, "we will eat together."

He hoped to induce her to eat by pretending to share her meal with her; he busied himself with making the array of dainty viands look more tempting, saying to her:

"You will be sick, Goldie, if you do not eat. Come, we will have our dinner together. Do not grieve so over that false wretch."

"You need not speak ill of him!" she cried with sudden passion.

He shrugged his shoulders at this unexpected outburst.

"I will say nothing of him if you prefer," he said; "but do sit up and take a bite."

"I do not wish to."

"The glass of wine, then. See! it looks very tempting, and will help you to be brave and not let anyone see that you are prostrated."

He thought to affect her by an appeal to her pride, but it did not act as he had hoped.

"I will not drink the wine," she said. "I do not wish to be brave. I want to die."

He was sure now that it was useless to attempt to induce her to eat, and he reluctantly removed the tray from beside her and placed it on a table at the other end of the room.

He was at a loss what to do, and began to pace the floor uneasily, wondering what he could say or do that would rouse her.

His eyes fell on the glass of wine and he reached out his hand to take it. He was not thirsty; he was not in need of any stimulant. It was there, and he was perplexed.

Perhaps he thought it would stimulate his faculties to drink the wine. He took up the glass and raised it to his lips.

"Won't you drink the wine, Goldie?" he pleaded.

"No, it would make me sick. The thought of it makes me sick," she answered impatiently.

He shrugged his shoulders. She would not drink—he would. He placed the poisoned liquor to his lips and slowly drained it.

But not so slowly as to notice any peculiarity in its flavor.

Not until it was down his throat, and already the fatal draught was beginning to do its fell work, did he realize that something was wrong with it.

Then there was a moment of agony, when his eyes seemed to start suddenly from his head, while the turgid blood filled his face.

“Gol—Goldie!” he gasped.

There was a note of agony in his tone that made her start up and look at him.

He was clutching at his throat and trying vainly to articulate more words. She leaped in affright from the couch and ran to him.

He staggered and reeled, hideous noises issuing from his throat as if a band of steel had constricted it.

She reached his side too late to catch him, even if her strength had been sufficient to enable her to uphold him.

He fell to the floor with a helpless thud, which told her that his senses had fled.

She leaned over him with a sense of helplessness that made her scream out for help first, ere leaning over him to murmur:

"What is the matter? Oh! can you not speak? He is dead!"

The final words burst from her with a wail of terror, and she gazed into his distorted, empurpled face with all the horror of one who for the first time looks upon sudden death.

Her hand lay on his heart, and her frozen stare was on his face when the door was thrown suddenly open, and Mildred burst in, such an expression on her face as terrified Goldie more even than the look that was on the features of the stricken man.

CHAPTER XVI.

GOLDIE IS ACCUSED. -

There had been a first spasm of terror at the sound of the body of her victim falling; but the next moment the wicked soul of the would-be murderess was filled with a hideous joy at the thought that Goldie was no longer standing between her and the man she worshiped so insanely.

She had flown up the stairs, composing her face to one of surprise, intending to ask her father the meaning of the wild scream and the noise.

But when she had opened the door and looked in at the form of her father prone upon the floor, with Goldie by his side, the horror of what she had done seemed to overwhelm her.

She gave vent to a horrid scream, and staggered back out of the room. Then, as with starting eyes, she looked still at the awful spectacle, she uttered scream on scream, bringing the servants to her from all parts of the house.

"Miss Mildred! what is the matter?" one and another cried.

Through the open door they all saw the body of Mr. Selden, with Goldie kneeling by his side, stiff with horror.

One after another they flocked in and stared at him. The story of his marriage to the factory girl was known to them all in some way, and the unspoken wonder was if the wedding and the death had aught to do with each other.

The servants did not feel the same awe of questioning her that they would in subjecting their haughty young mistress to their eager, startled queries.

So, while the men picked up the still form, the women clustered around the white-faced bride and asked her how it had happened.

"Send for a doctor!" were the first words she spoke; and her command was acted on at once.

Mildred, aroused to a sense of what she had done, stared wildly into the room.

Her first thought was that everybody would know that she had sent the wine up and would accuse her of murder.

With that thought came the fear of the consequences; and that fear overmastered every other idea. At any cost she must escape the toils of the law.

Choking down the inclination to cry out that she had never intended to kill her father, she staggered forward with ghastly face, and entered the room.

She could not go near where her father lay, but turned her back upon his body with a shudder and snatched the glass from the tray.

She was a girl who had never given her parent any great love; but the thought of what she had done was awful to her.

Nevertheless, she must fight down her remorse and fasten the blame on some one else, so that no suspicion should fall on her.

Every eye turned on her as she tottered in and took the glass. It was not easy for her to steady her nerves for what she was about to do, but by a mighty effort she did so, and cried huskily as she pointed with a shaking finger at Goldie.

"Was it you drank from this glass?"

"No," Goldie answered in a startled tone, "I did not touch it."

"Do you hear her?" Mildred almost screamed. "She says she did not touch it. Then my dear, dear papa must have done so."

An assenting murmur passed over the group of staring servants, who understood immediately that there was to be some startling denouement.

Mildred had started in on her course of crime and deceit, and she gathered strength and courage to continue as she saw that she was creating the impression she wished.

She looked around on all the startled faces with a dramatic air, shook the wineglass at Goldie and cried out in a voice of fierce anger:

"If he drank it, there lies the cause of his death!"

A murmur ran through the assemblage and Goldie stared; she was conscious that, in some way, she was accused, but the whole horrid truth did not strike her.

"What do you mean?" she murmured.

"She asks what I mean? Look at her guilty face! Oh, how could she so treat one who would have done all in his power to make her happy?"

"What do you mean?" again cried Goldie, her face growing whiter even than it had already been.

"I mean that you know full well the cause of his death."

"It is false! You accuse me of—— Oh, it is monstrous!"

"Do you hear?" screamed Mildred, certain now that suspicion would be effectually turned from her. "She denies it! She is a foul murderess! Do not let her escape."

"How dare you?" demanded Goldie, roused by the fearful accusation from her stupor.

"She could not wait for him to die, old as he was," screamed Mildred, filled with a hideous triumph as she saw the belief in Goldie's guilt pictured on the faces of the servants.

"It is false! false!" cried Goldie, a sudden fear that Mildred would be believed possessing her. "I knew

nothing of the wine until he brought it to me and asked me to drink it."

"That won't do, you know," said one of the men, ready to curry favor with his mistress by taking sides openly. "We all know where you come from. Factory girls marry millionaires for one purpose—money. Be careful what you say, my girl!"

"Yes, yes! be careful what you say!" echoed the others, standing farther away from her.

"I tell you I am innocent," Goldie cried in alarm. "Why should I wish him ill? He had done nothing to me."

"As if he had not made you his wife, while all you cared for was to be his widow. You wanted his gold," sneered the man who had first spoken.

"Heaven is my witness, I wish I had never become his wife," wailed Goldie.

"Run for a policeman!" said the man to one of the servants.

Goldie tottered and would have fallen but for the support of a chair, which she caught by the back.

But, in the very crisis of her trouble, her courage came to her. She had been so steeped in woe that it had seemed as if she was in no way herself. But now she started up with a proud look in her violet eyes, and gazed at Mildred as if she knew that she was the one foe to face.

"Why do you accuse me so readily of murdering him? You have no right to do it. You seem to know far too much of what was in that glass."

Mildred staggered back as if struck a blow in the face, but recovered quickly and cried out:

"And now she accuses me, his own child! Oh! she must be wicked, indeed!"

"Never mind, Miss Mildred," said one of the women soothingly. "It won't be long before she has her deserts, for here comes an officer who will take her and put her where she will not be able to do harm to anyone."

Goldie, with a half-suppressed scream, stared at the uniformed policeman, who had come hastily up the stairs and was standing in the doorway.

It seemed to her that her innocence would avail her nothing when once she was in the clutches of the law.

She was friendless and alone in the world; and she knew that the friendless and lonely received scant consideration in the hard world.

The policeman looked around with the eye of one accustomed to seeking for criminals in the most unlikely places.

"Well?" he demanded gruffly, "what is the matter?"

"Murder, sir!" was the response from one of the servants.

"Murder!"

Instinctively he looked for signs of blood, and as he looked his eyes fell on the body of Mr. Selden, and he was by his side in a moment.

"Is this the murdered man?" he demanded sharply.

"It is."

"And who killed him?"

"I accuse her, his wife!" cried Mildred, pointing her finger at Goldie.

The policeman looked at the beautiful face of the latter, and his eye quickly scanned her clothing, so unlike what the garments of a millionaire's wife should be.

"I am innocent," cried Goldie. "I call Heaven to witness that I am innocent! It is a terrible plot to ruin me."

Mildred laughed scornfully, but when the officer sought to look at her she turned her head away, as if she were seeking for something.

"Why do you accuse this lady?" he asked sternly.

Goldie seemed to see that he was inclined to be friendly toward her, and she ran to his side and caught his rough hand.

"I am innocent," she murmured. "Indeed I am innocent!"

"It was to her interest to have him die," Mildred said viciously. "She only married him for his money,

and she hoped to have that without him if he were dead."

"But what evidence is there of his murder at all?" asked the officer. "It looks to me as if he had died of apoplexy."

Mildred had chosen her poison to thus mislead anyone, but now that such a selection threatened to thwart her plot to ruin Goldie, she wished she had taken some other poison which would have left a clearer trace behind.

"Here!" she cried triumphantly, holding out the wineglass, "this is the evidence of her guilt. He drank from this wineglass and died."

The officer took the glass and looked swiftly from one face to the other.

"I will keep the glass," he said, and thrust it into his pocket.

"Here comes the doctor!" some one cried.

"You people get out!" the officer said to the servants. "Remain by me, madam," he whispered to Goldie, whose beautiful face had won his sympathies.

The servants went grumblingly out, feeling as if they were being defrauded of their rights in being deprived of the chance to be present at the arrest of the bride.

The doctor entered the room hastily, and with a glance saw where it was that his services were needed.

"I am afraid you are too late, doctor," the officer said.

The doctor glided to the side of the prostrate man and bent silently over him for a few moments.

"He is not dead yet," he said.

With a cry of joy Goldie sped to the side of her husband and caught his hand, though her eyes were glued on the face of the physician.

"Can you save him, sir?" she asked eagerly.

The doctor shook his head.

"I fear not, but I may revive him. I hope to do so; but in these cases of apoplexy one never knows."

"They say it is not apoplexy, but poison," the officer said in a low tone.

"Who says? What kind of poison?" the physician inquired quickly. "There is but one poison I know that would produce such an effect."

The officer drew out the wineglass and handed it to the doctor.

"The poison is supposed to have been contained in this."

The physician took the glass hastily and smelled carefully of it. Then he held it up so that the light from the gas-jet fell on it.

"Yes," he muttered, "it is the poison. I will do what I can, but the case is hopeless."

CHAPTER XVII.

"I PUT THE POISON THERE!"

Both Mildred and Goldie watched with breathless interest while the physician worked over the unconscious man.

And when, after a while, it became evident that he would be restored to life for a period at least, the hearts of them both throbbed painfully.

But not from the same cause. It was safety for one of them, and ruin for the other, and when by chance the eyes of Goldie met those of Mildred, each seemed to read the heart of the other.

"He is coming to," the doctor said in a low tone.

They all leaned over him. Mildred glided to the side of Goldie, and hissed fiercely:

"He was nothing to you; let me be nearest him when he opens his eyes."

It seemed to her that she must be there to stop the condemnatory words she could almost hear falling from his lips.

But the officer put her aside with a motion of his strong hand.

"It is the wife's place," he said.

"Is it the assassin's place, too?" demanded Mildred.

Ere any answer could be given Mr. Selden's eyes opened and rested immediately on the face of Goldie.

Both the physician and the officer were struck by the look of affection and anxiety that were instantly in the sick man's eyes.

Then they saw his eyes wander past them to something else, which a swift glance told them was the face of his child, and they saw the utmost horror in them then.

"Can you speak?" the officer asked quickly.

Mildred leaned forward eagerly. The poisoned man made a terrible effort to reply, but without avail. A look of triumph and relief passed over the dark face of Mildred.

The physician, who had been watching him with careful scrutiny, placed a few drops of some powerful drug on the livid lips.

The subtle liquid trickled into the patient's mouth, and in a moment a decided change was visible in his expression.

Again he essayed to move his lips, and this time he succeeded, although no sound issued from between them.

"Give him a few more drops," urged the officer anxiously.

"No," the physician answered in a low tone. "He will speak in a moment."

And such proved to be the case. He tried several times, and at last by a frightful effort unloosed the bonds that held his tongue, and whispered in a strange tone:

"What is the matter?"

"You are ill."

"What is the matter?" the sick man asked again.

"Have you been poisoned?" the officer asked.

The eyes of Mr. Selden turned on his daughter with a terrible, accusing look, which she turned away to avoid. Then he said slowly:

"Who said I was poisoned?"

"Your daughter; she accuses——"

"Doctor, you will have him worn out," interrupted Mildred with trembling lips. "You must not let him talk any more."

Mr. Selden's eyes flashed once at his daughter while she was speaking, and then returned with pertinacity to the face of the officer.

"She accuses whom?" he whispered.

"She accuses your wife."

"It is false!" he gasped. "It was——"

Mildred, with trembling limbs and pallid lips, threw herself on her knees by her father's side and cried out:

"Be careful what you say, papa, oh, be careful!"

There was a wild pleading in her tone that betrayed

her terrible anxiety, and caused the officer to place his hand on her shoulder, while he bent eagerly over her father.

"Who is the guilty person, sir?"

Mildred's trembling hand was on her father's. He feebly drew his hand away and fixed his gaze on the violet orbs of her he had made his wife.

"There is no guilty person," he said, "there was no poison."

"But we have the poisoned glass," the officer said.

"I put the poison in there myself," Mr. Selden said sadly. "Goldie, I put it there myself. You will not doubt me?"

"No, I will not doubt you."

"That is a good girl. Doctor, can you save me?"

"There is always hope when——"

Mr. Selden feebly stayed him.

"I think I am dying. Is that true?"

"I never give up hope," the physician said.

"But there are things that must be done ere I can die," Mr. Selden said. "Tell me the truth. I can bear it. I am already too old to fear death. I must know the truth."

"If you have aught to do ere you die, it would be well to do it at once," was the response, in a low tone.

"I wish my lawyer to come—Mr. James Follett, Nassau Street. Have him here without delay."

"He lives within a few blocks," the officer said. "I will go fetch him."

There was no longer any question of the innocence of Goldie, so nothing was said to her by the policeman as he hastened away.

"Come here, Goldie!" the dying man said: "I wish to say a few words to you."

Mildred started up and bent over him, murmuring, in an agonized whisper.

"I did not mean it, papa. Forgive me!"

"I forgive you freely, Mildred."

"And, papa, do not tell her that Donald loves her. Let me have him."

"I will leave that for Heaven to adjust," he answered. "Now go, and let me have a few last words with my little Goldie."

Mildred crept away to the other end of the room, and there sunk upon a chair. Goldie drew near to Mr. Selden again.

"Goldie, dear," he said. "I shall not live to bask in the sunshine of your beautiful eyes, but I hope to make your path in life the smoother and easier for having taken my name. I hope you will live to be happy and beloved. I know your sorrow, dear, but I am so near to death that it seems easy for me to see that you will yet be happy."

She shook her head sadly, the tears filling her eyes.

"I fear I shall never be happy," she murmured.

"Yes, you shall," he said. "I have sent for my lawyer, in order that I may leave you well provided for. You shall be worth a million the moment I am dead."

CHAPTER XVIII.

GOLDIE'S OATH.

It was plain to Mildred that it lay in her dying father's power to give her over into the hands of justice for the crime she had committed.

She feared lest he should do so, and, had it been possible at that moment, she would have added a few drops more of the poison to the dose he had already taken, so that she would have been left free to wreak her vengeance on Goldie.

But it was not possible, and there was naught for her to do but to sit at the far end of the room, gnawing her lip and gazing with the bloodshot eyes of a tigress at her father and Goldie.

She knew that what she had done had but brought Goldie and Donald nearer together; and all she thought of then was how she could keep them still apart.

But for her hatred of Goldie, she might have felt some remorse still for having done what had ended in the murder of her own father.

The thought that her rival would come out of the affair enriched and still free, drove her to madness.

And there, in that room of death, she stared fiercely at Goldie, and plotted savagely for her downfall and ruin.

All that was human in her nature, excepting only her mad passion for Donald, seemed to have gone out of her heart, and no wild beast could have been more dangerous than she, the darkly beautiful murderess.

Had the doctor not been in the room it is more than likely that she would have leaped upon Goldie and tried to strangle her, so furious was her hatred of her.

But the doctor remained there, pacing between her and the strangely assorted pair as if he knew that it would be dangerous to depart.

"The next time," muttered the vengeful girl, "I will not make a mistake. You shall not take Donald from me. He may not be mine, but he never shall be yours."

She admitted the possibility of losing Donald, although she was his affianced wife; but in her heart she was determined to strive and plot and scheme until she had become his bride.

"I will beguile you with fair words and promises," she muttered. "I will wear a mask of grief and contrition until you are in my power. Ah! I see plainly how it will all end."

Her black eyes flamed as she thought over the details of what she would do, and how she would punish Goldie for having come between her and Donald.

It did not occur to her to forgive Goldie because the latter had done nothing voluntarily to injure her. It

was enough that her rival was beautiful and bewitching, and had won the love of Donald Irwin. For that she would punish Goldie.

Goldie, meanwhile, was kneeling by the side of the dying man whose bride she was, and her gentle heart smote her because she could not in honesty speak to him words of love.

But death had appeared before his eyes and had opened them to the truth as they had never been opened before.

He yet could not understand that money was not all-potent, but he could see that his age had put it beyond the power of his beautiful bride ever to love him.

Moreover, he saw in its true light his own conduct in hastening the marriage between them, when poor Goldie was in such a frame of mind that she almost would have become the bride of Death.

He looked into her wondrous eyes as they were bent pityingly on him, and he thought within himself that at least it was in his way to put happiness in her grasp.

"Goldie," he murmured. "I know now that I was wrong in wedding you. It would have been a cruel thing had I lived to let you waste the sweetness of your youth and beauty on me."

"Do not blame yourself for what was as much my fault as yours," she replied gently.

"No," he murmured, "it was not at all your fault. You were unable to consider what you were doing. I took advantage of your condition of mind. But you can easily forgive me, for I shall leave you rich. Then you can choose where you will."

Goldie did not interrupt him or deny what he said.

She did not think it worth while to tell him that there could be no happiness for one whose heart was broken.

She knew she could never love any other than Donald, although she felt that she ought with all her strength strive to despise him.

"You will forgive me, my little bride, will you not?" he pleaded.

"If there is anything for me to forgive, I freely do it," she responded.

His eyes wandered over to where Mildred sat, and his voice sunk so low that Goldie was forced to bend over him until her face almost touched his ere she could hear.

"There is one more thing," he said.

She saw that he looked appealingly at her, and she answered:

"If there is anything I can do, command me."

"I do not command it. I beg it. I wish you to forgive Mildred."

"Freely," Goldie answered without hesitation.

She did not know how bitterly Mildred hated her; nor could she guess what dark thoughts were speeding through the latter's brain.

"Before ever you knew Donald he loved her and intended to make her his wife," he went on; and then looked inquiringly into her face.

She nodded her head. It seemed to her that she could not say anything.

Mr. Selden did not doubt that he was telling the exact truth, and could not guess by the spasm of pain that showed on her beautiful face that she was suffering torture.

"I do not say that Donald did not have a fancy for you; but he is as proud as Lucifer, and would not have wedded a factory girl."

If he had thrust a knife into her heart and turned it around it could not have given her greater anguish.

She could not doubt the words of the dying man when he spoke with such assurance; and if there had been any lingering hope in her breast it went out then.

"I want you," he continued, "to promise me that you will let Mildred have him should he now return to you."

"He will not return to me," she said brokenly.

"He may. You will be rich now, and can educate yourself in all the little accomplishments you now lack. Then, when you are a figure in society, he may return to you."

"I do not think he will," she said again.

"Ah!" murmured the dying man, "wealth condones many a fault of birth in the eyes of even the most aristocratic. He will not look down upon you now as he did."

"If he should come to me again with a tale of love, I would turn him away with the scorn that is his meed," she answered wearily.

"Will you promise me that? Will you swear to me that you will give him to Mildred? She loves him so madly that she would die if he were to desert her."

"I will promise it, swear it, if you will."

"Yes, yes, swear it. One moment! Call Mildred hither. I wish her to hear your oath."

Goldie rose to her feet and turned toward Mildred. It mattered very little to her what she did. Hope was gone, and her heart was torn with woe. As well humor the dying man.

"Mildred," she said, "will you come here? Your father wishes to speak to you."

Mildred rose without a word. She had schooled herself by this time to play any part that seemed best to accomplish her end.

When she had reached the bedside, she stood looking down into the dying man's face. He gazed up into her eyes for a moment, then sighed and murmured:

"Tell her, Goldie, why I wished her here."

"He wishes me to swear that I will not have aught to do with Donald Irwin. He wishes me to swear that I will give him up to you."

The black eyes flashed fire as they glanced from face to face, but the lips of Mildred did not open. She was not yet sure that she could command her speech.

"I have told him I would," Goldie went on wearily, "though it does not seem worth while. If he loves me it is without honorable intentions, and I spurn such a love. If he do not love me, I would not wed him."

"Yet you will swear?" Mr. Selden said eagerly, his eyes dwelling with a fearful look on the face of his daughter.

"I will swear."

"Mildred," he murmured gaspingly, "say the words of an oath, and let her repeat after you."

Mildred choked back something in her throat, and said in a low, strained tone:

"Do you wish it, Goldie?"

"Yes, I wish it. Anything!"

Mildred veiled her eyes to hide the light that

gleamed in them, though she could not hide her thoughts from her father, who seemed to read her through her mask.

"The oath, Mildred!" he gasped.

Mildred hesitated a moment, then opened her lips and her words came slowly forth:

"I swear that whether Donald Irwin love me truly or falsely, I will give him up to Mildred Selden, to whom he is betrothed. And may my soul perish if I do not keep this oath!"

Goldie shuddered as she listened, but she faithfully repeated the words to the end.

Mildred flashed a swift look of triumph at her as she finished, and the dying man closed his eyes as if content.

Goldie neither saw nor heard what passed after that. It seemed to her, somehow, as if she had pronounced her own doom. She had uttered words that would keep her from the only man she could ever love.

"Mildred!" whispered her father, after a moment's pause.

She bent over him. He glanced at Goldie and saw that she would not hear what was said. Mildred murmured:

"What is it, father?"

"I had her take that oath so that you should be sure that she could not come between you and him."

"She will never dare to break that oath."

"No; she will not break it, come what may. And now that it is taken you must swear to me that you will never again attempt her life."

Mildred gazed at him with a look that he could not understand, but which filled him with apprehension.

"I swear," said Mildred, "that I will never again attempt her life."

"My curse upon you if you break your oath!" he said.

CHAPTER XIX.

WEAVING A NEW PLOT.

Charles Selden was dead—murdered by his daughter, and she was shut up in her own apartment, not grieving, but plotting.

He had lived to put his name to a codicil to his will, by which Goldie, his widow, became the possessor of over a million dollars.

He had closed his eyes without agony because the physician, knowing he could not save his patient, had given him drugs to drive away pain.

He had died with a lie on his lips—a solemn lie which had saved his daughter from her just doom as a murderess, or Goldie from an unjust one.

He had gone from this life, holding in his the little hand of his factory girl, whose wonderful beauty had won his love.

“You will be rich, my beautiful Goldie,” he murmured. “You will be so rich that the world will seek you out, and worship at your feet. But when you are known you will be loved for your goodness and beauty.”

She shook her head sadly, and did not reply. He went falteringly on as if he could see all he described:

"Donald is not the only one. There will be others—rich, handsome and aristocratic as he, and you will never lack for lovers. Marry one of them, my Goldie, and be a queen in society. I am sorry I could not live to see it. But perhaps it is better as it is."

No doubt Goldie came nearer to loving him as he lay there dead than ever she could have done had he lived, for she saw him now only in his unselfishness.

And after all he was her husband, though only in name, and the heart of the lonely girl went out to him.

She bent over him and pressed a kiss on his cold forehead, then turned away, and left the room, a stranger in her own house.

She felt that she must be alone, but knew not where to go. She would have spoken to the housekeeper had she been there, but the servants had all retired silently downstairs.

It was Mildred who had been watching her, and who now stepped up to her and said in a sorrowful tone:

"Goldie, I know I have not been kind to you, but we are both in grief together, and I hope you will not scorn my offer of friendship."

Grateful for a kind word at such a time, Goldie forgot the suspicions that had flashed into her brain at the time Mildred had accused her of the murder of her father.

She turned her great eyes on the other, and held out her little hand.

"I have no quarrel with you, Mildred. There is no reason why we should not be friends, if you will."

Mildred took the hand that was offered her, and pressed it with hypocritical warmth.

"What a good little thing you are!" she said. "Come, I will show you the guest-chamber, which is the most fitting now for the mistress of the house. You know this house is yours now, Goldie."

"Yes, I know it is mine, but I hope you will always consider it your home. I would never have consented to accept your father's wealth if he had not told me that you were also well provided for."

"Yes, I am well provided for," Mildred replied; though the truth was that she had not as much as Goldie, and if she had had her way, would have taken every cent from the latter.

But it was not her purpose to betray her anger at that time. She nursed a terrible plot in her heart, and it was necessary, for its full execution, that she should put on the appearance of perfect friendliness.

So she led Goldie to the room which had been prepared for the most esteemed guests of the house, and left her there.

Then she had gone to her own room, in order that

she might be alone to think over and perfect in detail her evil scheme against the happiness of poor Goldie.

The servants whispered among themselves over the startling events of the evening, and most of them had no doubt that Goldie would take her revenge on them by discharging them all.

The housekeeper, however, who had taken no part against Goldie, bade them have no fear of such a thing, adding:

"I will go see her and speak to her about it."

Goldie was sitting in sad silence by the window of the room, looking out on the fashionable street, and thinking that great as the change in her fortunes was, she would far rather be the Goldie of a week ago than the wealthy widow of Charles Selden, and the betrayed sweetheart of Donald Irwin.

"How could he do it?" she murmured. "He seemed all that was good and noble, and my whole heart went out to him as if Heaven itself had sanctioned my love. I wish I was dead! I wish I was dead!"

It was at this moment that the housekeeper knocked at the door, and was bidden to enter. Goldie looked inquiringly at her.

"I beg your pardon for disturbing you at such a time, Mrs. Selden," the housekeeper said; "but I know you are now the mistress of the house, and I thought

I ought to come and see if you had any special orders to give."

Goldie shook her head.

"I have no orders to give. I know nothing of the way to conduct such a great mansion as this. You look kind and good; won't you help me?"

There was something so sweet and appealing in the tones of her voice that a tear started to the eye of the good woman.

"Indeed," she cried quickly, "I will do everything in my power for you. I am glad you are not the haughty, high-headed sort as Miss Mildred, for if you had been I don't think I could have stood it very long."

"Hush! say nothing against Miss Mildred."

"Well, I suppose I ought not, and I won't, but I do want to ask you about the servants. I know that some of them didn't act very nice when Miss Mildred said those strange things about you in the other room."

"Miss Mildred did not know what she was saying. It does not matter what the servants said or did."

"Then you don't wish any of them sent away for it?"

"Certainly not."

"Ah, you are as good as you are beautiful. There are not many who would be as forgiving; but I told them it would be so. I thought I read you aright.

You won't be sorry, Mrs. Selden. Every one will be the more faithful to you for your goodness."

After that, everything went on with the decorum proper to a house of death, until the day of the funeral.

If there had been an invitation to the friends of the family to attend the funeral of Mr. Selden there would have been a great many present, for some of the circumstances of the strange and romantic wedding and sudden death had been whispered around, and all society was eager for a glimpse of the factory girl whose beauty had won the aged millionaire.

But it did not suit Mildred that Goldie should be seen by too many, and therefore she put the matter to her in such a way that she gladly consented to have the funeral as quiet as possible.

So society was disappointed, and when the funeral was over the two mourners were enabled to seclude themselves as they wished.

Mildred had lost no opportunity to ingratiate herself into the good will of Goldie, and, as the latter was drifting along aimlessly, it was easy to influence her.

When they were alone in the house, Mildred sought Goldie in her room, and sat down beside her, saying:

"Goldie, dear, is it not time that we made some plans for the future?"

Goldie looked wonderingly at her.

"Why do you say we? Is not your future laid out for you?"

Mildred knew that she referred to Donald and the probability of his making her his wife.

"I cannot be married at once," she said with a touch of reproach in her tone.

She might have confessed, though she would rather have bitten her tongue out, that she had heard nothing of Donald since he left the house that night.

"I suppose not," Goldie said in a low tone.

"No; we shall wait until after a few months, at least, have passed. Goldie, dear," she said suddenly, "I hope you bear me no ill will because of what has occurred?"

"None, I assure you."

"I am not sure," Mildred said reflectively, "that I ought not to send Donald from me because of his conduct toward you."

She watched furtively and saw a quick gleam in the violet eyes. Hope was not dead in that heart, then, and there must be no faltering in her terrible purpose.

"Let no thought of me weigh with you," Goldie said brokenly. "Donald Irwin is dead to me, and I would be glad if I never again heard his name mentioned."

"It shall be so if you wish it," Mildred said; "so we will return to my object in coming here just now."



Have you thought, Goldie, how painful it will be to remain in this house now?"

Goldie looked eagerly at her. The thought of dwelling there all alone, as they must, had carried dread to her heart.

"I had thought of it. Is there anything else we can do?"

"There is the country house. It is mine, but you are as welcome there as you have told me I am here. Why not close up this place and go there?"

"I should be so glad!" Goldie cried.

CHAPTER XX.

DONALD IRWIN'S RETURN.

So it was arranged that the servants should be taken to the country house, with the exception of a few who would not leave the city in the winter time.

There were a number of things necessary to be done, and Mildred was out of the house many times, Goldie remaining home.

There were papers to be signed, lawyers to be consulted and a great deal else to be done, so that Goldie was not idle.

Mildred knew everything Goldie did; but the latter was far from knowing what the former did when she was out of the house. If she had known she would never have gone to the country house with her. But she neither knew nor suspected, and so the preparations went on.

Goldie grew calmer in her grief, perhaps, but as the days went by it seemed as if her heart became heavier and heavier.

Those who met her as the lawyers and men of business did were always charmed and fascinated by her beauty and sweetness, and they all conceived the no-

tion that she was deeply but silently grieving for the husband she had lost.

She and Mildred knew that the grief was for the loss of faith in one she had implicitly trusted.

"She is breaking her heart yearning for him!" Mildred said fiercely to herself. "If they should meet now, who can tell what might happen?"

When this thought entered her brain she began to pace the floor and to think what she should do.

"I will bribe one of the servants to tell me who comes while I am out," she muttered.

But when she began to go over the servants in her mind, it was long before she could decide which one to take that much into her confidence, for they had all learned to love the young mistress who had been so kind to them.

At last, however, she rang her bell, and bade her maid send James, the head footman, to her. When he came, wondering, she said to him:

"James, you have always been a faithful servant."

He bowed and looked very grateful for her appreciation, though the fact was that she had sent for him because he was the least faithful of the servants, and therefore the one most likely to serve her purpose.

"Now," she went on, "our dear Mrs. Selden is so unused to looking after so much that I am afraid something will go wrong during my enforced absence

from the house, while we are preparing to go to the country."

"Yes, ma'am."

"So," she continued, in her suavest manner, as she held a five-dollar bill in her hand, "I want you to keep close watch of all who come here while I am away, so that I may know, without having to bother my dear father's sweet little widow."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Do you think you understand?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Very well, then. Here is a little bill to make you careful, and there will be as much more for each day's faithful service to me."

James pocketed the money with a knowing grin, and said slyly:

"Thank you, miss. You won't pay your money for nothing. I won't let a cat look at her without letting you know."

After that Mildred went away on her mysterious errands with a greater degree of comfort, though not at perfect ease with herself.

And James waited with intense curiosity to discover why he had been retained with so liberal a fee.

He answered the bell himself in these days, and his fellow servants, knowing his former capacity for shirking his duty, wondered at his sudden diligence.

"I think James is very ill," said one of them.

"Why do you think so?" asked a pretty housemaid.

"He is so very good these days that it looks as if he was preparing to die," was the response, which caused a great laugh in the kitchen.

James, however, kept his counsel, knowing that a secret in such a household was only valuable when kept, and he hoped to make the secret he should learn worth much some day.

Perhaps it would never amount to much; but he was not kept waiting long without learning it.

One day when he answered the bell who should be standing there but Donald Irwin, who had disappeared so suddenly, and had not been seen since.

"Good-day, sir," stammered James, standing aside to let Donald enter.

"I was called away suddenly," said Donald hesitatingly, "and had no time to send for my things."

"Yes, sir; they are all right, sir. Miss Mildred had them packed in your trunk, sir."

"Very good of her," he said, mechanically, his eyes seeming to search the house from where he stood. "I suppose she is in."

"She is out at present, sir. Is there anything you would wish to say to her, or will you wait?"

"I—I think I will wait. I—I was sorry not to be here during—during the—the——"

"Melancholy occasion, sir," suggested James, who was rather proud of his eloquence.

"Exactly. I—I suppose Mrs. Selden is much—much prostrated?"

"Very much so, sir. In fact, sir, it is a surprise to everybody. Not of course that it becomes me to suggest that she did not love him, you know, sir. But it is only natural, all things considered——"

"Precisely," broke in Donald impatiently. "Where is Mrs. Selden, now?"

"With her lawyer in the library, sir."

Donald reflected, and fumbled in his pocket at the same time.

James took the opportunity to study him, and the result of his studies was the reflection that he had never seen Mr. Irwin look so haggard.

Donald was pale and worn, and his fine eyes were almost fierce-looking in the intensity of their gaze.

Then, too, his clothing, which had been the admiration of many a man of fashion, who could not understand how he was always so perfectly dressed, was now almost slovenly.

He had all the appearance of a man whose mental anguish had been so great as to absorb all of his attention to the exclusion of lesser things.

He remained unconscious of the gaze of the servant, and slowly drew a roll of bills from his pocket.

James' intuition was keen enough to enable him to comprehend what was going to follow, and on the instant his thought formed itself.

"I wonder if Miss Mildred paid me the five to tell her that Mr. Irwin had come to see Mrs. Selden?"

"James," said Donald, slowly, "I want you to do something for me."

He gave the footman a bill as he spoke, and a swift glance told James that it was of the same value as the one Mildred had given him.

"Yes, sir; anything in my power," and he thrust the bill quickly into his pocket lest one of the other servants should see it.

"I am going into the reception-room here, and I want you to tell Mrs. Selden that a gentleman wishes to see her. Wait until the lawyer is gone."

"Shall I tell her who it is, sir?" demanded James, with a pretense at stupidity.

"No. Do not let her know. Say only that it is a gentleman."

"Very well, sir. But I hear the door of the library open. Hark! their voices!"

Donald listened, and as the dulcet tones of Goldie's voice fell on his ear, his eyes filled with a look of adoration.

"Better get into the reception-room, sir, if you don't want to be seen."

Donald started as if waked from an ecstasy, and glided into the room.

His heart was throbbing violently, and his hands trembled as he rubbed them one against the other. He leaned against the mantel and listened for another sound of her voice.

"Now," he murmured, with dry throat, "unworthy though I am, I shall see once more that wondrous face. Fool! fool! that I was, not to know my own heart! Will she forgive me? She must, she must when she hears me to the end."

He did not know of the terrible oath she had taken at the death-bed of her husband.

CHAPTER XXI.

"I CANNOT BE YOURS!"

If Goldie had followed the dictates of her own heart she would not have put on mourning for her husband. It seemed such a mockery to her. She did not and could not mourn for him, as the sombre weeds she wore seemed to proclaim.

She had protested to Mildred that she could not bear to do it, but Mildred had urged her not to shock society by refusing to do what all widows did, whether they had loved or hated their husbands in life.

So she had done as they wished her to, and the fashionable dressmaker had done her best; rejoiced, if the truth be told, to have such a beautiful creature to deck out.

And the result was what might have been expected. In spite of her woe, in spite of the sad expression that filled her eyes, she was strangely beautiful in the sombre garments.

The violet of her eyes seemed deeper, and the gold of her hair seemed more than ever like the precious metal spun out in fairy threads.

The men who came to transact business with her became entranced with her rare and seductive beauty. It seemed as if men only looked on her to adore her

She stood at the door of the library bidding the lawyer good-by. He was not a young man, but he was in the prime of life and a bachelor.

He had lived until now careless of the love of women. When he met Goldie he forgot his reserve, forgot that he had laughed at love, and worshiped her.

But something told him that it would be as well to woo a marble statue; so he worshiped in silence, saying to himself that here was a woman with an incurable grief.

He bade her farewell, and she forgot him ere he left the house; he never forgot her while he lived.

She turned back into the library, when James glided respectfully after her and spoke to her as she was sinking wearily into a chair at the desk. It seemed to her that her head would burst some day with its load of cares.

"A gentleman to see you, madam."

"Who?" she asked, without looking up.

"A gentleman."

Her brows contracted impatiently, but no petulant word fell from her lips, red despite her sorrow.

"What is his name, please?"

"He did not give it," said James, taking the chance.

"Did he wish to see me on business? But I suppose that is it. Bring him in here, please!"

James chuckled as he glided away.

"Miss Mildred would never have been fooled so easily," he muttered.

Donald was pacing the floor when James entered the room. He stopped and gasped:

"Well?"

"You are to go to her in the library, sir."

Donald thrust another bill into his hand, saying hastily:

"Let no one interrupt us! I have business of importance."

James laughed softly, as he buried the last bribe in his capacious pocket.

"Business!" he ejaculated to himself; "I'll bet a dollar it's love. Ah! there will be fun here one of these days; but that is none of my business. Let them have it out while I reap the golden harvest."

Donald, with white face and set jaws, hastened to the library. In it was contained the sum and substance of his life's happiness.

Goldie was trying to fix her mind on some papers when he entered, and with the bliss of seeing her once more came also the feeling that it was pitiful to see that beautiful creature, hardly more than a child, already weighed down with the cares of wealth.

He closed the door as he came in, and stood devour-

ing her with his hungry eyes. He could not have spoken if his life had depended on it.

She looked up as he remained silent, and as she saw who stood there the weary expression faded from her eyes, and something quite different flashed into them.

She started to her feet, too, and her little hand went out with a queenly gesture of indignation.

"How dared you come here?" she cried, her bosom swelling.

How rarely beautiful she was! How could he ever have been so mad as to cast from him such a pearl? His voice came to him.

"I came because my love would not let me remain away," he answered.

She saw plainly enough that he was thinner and that his cheeks were haggard; but it seemed as if she could no longer read his eyes as she could do when first they met.

"Your love!" she cried scornfully. "Your love is an insult."

The color rose to his pale face.

"True love can never be an insult," he said; "and my love for you is true and strong. It is woven into the very fibre of my being, Goldie. My love is not an insult."

She made a gesture of passionate disdain.

"Are you not betrothed to Mildred Selden?" she asked.

"I am betrothed to Mildred Selden. It was the act of a madman, and I shall beg her to release me."

"And that will be the act of a despicable wretch. But this does not concern me, sir. You can have no reason for prolonging an interview which you have obtained by trickery. If I had known who it was wished to see me, I would have refused you admittance to my presence. There is but one person in this house you have any right to see, and that is the woman you asked to be your wife."

How beautiful—how maddeningly beautiful she looked as the scathing words leaped from her lips!

"Goldie!" he cried passionately, "I have no right to wed Mildred. I do not love her. It was a horrible mistake. I never loved her. It was you, you I loved."

Her lip curled as she listened.

"Are you sure now that it is not my money you love? I am rich now, you no doubt have heard. I am no better born than I was before, but I am rich. Does that level the barrier between the plebeian and the aristocrat?"

"You stab me with your words, Goldie, but I deserve the worst you can say excepting only that I did not love you when I said I did. That was love, Goldie,

and you knew it even better than I. Your pure heart told you what was hidden from me by the madness which was the result of my teaching."

"Yes, I loved you," she said frankly, "and you said you loved me. You said it and thought you were lying; is that what you mean? Would you have me believe that you discovered that you told the truth only after I became rich?"

"What is your money to me? What do I care for it? Throw it away! oh, my darling! throw it away! Give it to Mildred. I will give mine—all I possess—to some charity, and will go out to begin the world in poverty if only you will be by my side. Money! it is nothing! Birth! nothing, less than nothing! Love is everything, Goldie, and if you turn me from you now, when I know that your heart is throbbing with love for me, you will be wretched as long as you live. Goldie! forgive me and be mine!"

It was not possible to listen to him as he poured out his heart in molten words of love, and not know that he was in passionate earnest.

Goldie tried to be hard and cold, but her own heart pleaded for him more eloquently than he pleaded for himself.

She tried to speak again with scorn and contumely in her words and tone; but when her lips opened, they

knew that he spoke the truth. She knew that he loved her.

But ever before her eyes hovered a blinding flame, in which she could read the words of her oath to the dying man.

"I cannot be yours," she wailed. "You have come too late. I have sworn an awful oath before Heaven, by the side of my dying husband, that I would not stand between you and Mildred. I have sworn it, and you have plighted your troth. You must wed her!"

CHAPTER XXII.

A TERRIBLE ORDEAL.

Goldie's words were a complete confession, even if her manner had not already betrayed her. Donald knew she had forgiven him. He had never doubted she still loved him. He may have asked himself in his anguish if she did, but in his heart he was always certain.

And now he knew that he had not only her heart, but her forgiveness as well, and the knowledge so elated him that he snatched her to his breast and cried out in tones of profound joy:

"You are mine once more, my darling. Ah, I shall never again do or say aught which will permit you to doubt me for a single instant!"

She yielded herself to the bliss of his caresses for a moment, because it would not have been humanly possible to help it.

Then recollection came, and she knew that she must end this scene though it broke both their hearts.

That awful oath in its words of fire still gleamed before her eyes, and she knew that it would ever be thus. There was no other way but to give him up to Mildred.

His lips were on hers, and he was drinking ecstasy from them, when, with a strangled cry, she pushed him away, and her voice rose to a wail as she cried out:

"Oh, Donald, my dearest love, you are too late! I have given you up by a fearful oath, sworn by the bed of death."

He would not give her up yet, but let her hold herself at arm's length from him, while his burning eyes drank in the bewitching beauty of her face.

"And do you think I will give you up?" he murmured. "Oh, my darling, can you not see that it was but a trick to keep us apart? But we will foil them because our love is so great that it has brought us together again."

A wail of utter misery broke from her lips. Why would he not understand?

"Donald, Donald! it may not be. I swore by his dying bed, and my oath is sacred. If I broke it even for the bliss of having you, I should always be haunted by it, and it would drag me to madness. Besides, an oath is too sacred to be broken for any cause. You are come too late, my Donald."

Her despair and woe were so great that it seemed to him they would kill her. He realized the truth for the first time. He had lost her. He might hold her in his arms because his strength was greater than hers,

and perhaps because her heart was all his. But he might never possess her while Mildred lived, because her conscience was too firm in the right, her soul too pure.

He had lost her in the moment of finding her. He must give her up because a dying man and a living, wily woman had duped her. The thought almost drove him mad.

He released his hold on her, and she staggered back and rested against the library table, her eyes dwelling on his convulsed face with an accession of misery.

"Goldie," he cried, "it is not right! Heaven will not bless such an oath! It was a trick of Mildred's! I can see it! Ah, you need not shake your head, as if I did not know the circumstances! I tell you it was a trick of hers, and she shall undo what she has done!"

There was in his face a look of terrible, implacable determination, and for a moment a wild thrill of joy shot through her, as if she had hoped he might win her freedom from her oath.

Then thought came, and she shook her head sadly. She knew better than he that it could not be.

"Donald," she moaned, "it is useless to struggle against fate. Mildred will never willingly give you up, and unless she does, I may not wed you, for my oath was that I would never stand between you."

"She must give me up," he said fiercely.

It seemed intolerable that anything should exist to separate him from his love.

"No," protested Goldie, with firmness, "you must wed her. You must tell her the truth, but when she insists, as I know she will, you must wed her."

"It would be sacrilege."

"It would be worse not to wed her after you have promised and I have sworn. Ah, Donald! do not make my task harder. It is killing me to struggle against you; but it is the only thing I can do."

"What!" he gasped wildly, "must I lose you now that everything has become so clear to me, and Heaven itself has seemed to smile on our love? Oh, Goldie, my love!"

"You have promised, and I have sworn," she moaned, hiding her face in her hands.

"We will break promise and oath. Heaven never intended either to hold."

"Heaven will never smile on us if we do not act honestly, Donald. You know that as well as I. Ah, Donald, be your noble self and help me in this woeful task of doing right."

He passed his hand hastily over his eyes and looked at her. Then a cry broke from his lips.

"Goldie, you are the noblest and the sweetest woman

that ever lived. I know you are right, and, Heaven helping me, I will do my duty."

She held out her hands toward him with a mournful smile on her face, but did not speak. She had won the hard battle, but was almost prostrated.

He took her hands in his, and covered them with burning kisses, every one of which seemed to her to sink into her very soul.

"Goldie! you are an angel! I shall do my duty, and yet something tells me that somehow, some way, we shall yet be happy. Good-by, my darling! Come what may we love each other. There is no barrier between us now."

"None, but Heaven itself!" she murmured, sinking in a swoon in his arms.

He caught her to him, and pressed her passionately to his breast, at the same time raining burning kisses down on her lips and eyes and cheeks.

"How good and pure and strong she is!" he cried, as he gazed down on the white, perfect face. "I will part from her so. Farewell, my best beloved, my own!"

He carried her tenderly to the divan that stood by the side of the room, and placed her there. Then pressing a last kiss upon her lips, he fled from the room.

James was still in the hall, trying vainly to look the pattern of a virtuous footman.

"Is Miss Mildred home?" Donald asked, with a vehemence that made the fellow stare.

"Not yet, sir."

"When she returns, tell her that I have been here, and say that I shall be here again this evening, when I would like to see her."

"Yes, sir."

Donald rushed from the house and disappeared down the street, while James stood watching him and shaking his head.

"What a queer lot they all are!" he murmured. "He pays me not to say anything, and then comes out and tells me to say it. Well, I can tell the truth for once."

And so he did, when Mildred returned; but he told it in his own way, because he wished to find out as much more as possible; always with a keen scent for possible blackmail in the future.

"Who has been here to-day?" Mildred asked, when she stepped into the hall about an hour later.

James repeated over the names of those who had been there, ending up with Donald's name. Then he knew that that was the one name for which Mildred had been waiting.

Her eyes filled with a sudden, lurid light, her lips trembled and her voice quavered as she panted:

"Did—did he—he ask for—for me?"

"Not at first, Miss Mildred. The fact is—but maybe you don't care to know what happened."

She thrust a bill into his hand, and said savagely:

"Tell me everything."

"Well, he gave me a dollar not to tell what happened."

"Well?"

"Well, he asked to see Mrs. Selden, but made me take the message that a gentleman wished to see her."

"Yes, yes! and she saw him?"

"She saw him in the library."

"Ah! she knew full well who it was," hissed Mildred, furiously, regardless of the presence of the footman. "What—what took place there? Come, it is worth your while to tell me everything. I know that servants listen at the doors. What took place?"

James looked very foolish. Not at being accused of listening at the doors, but because he had such a meager report to give.

"To tell you the truth, miss, I had no chance to listen. I looked through the keyhole just for a minute though."

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"To tell you the truth, miss, I had no chance to listen. I looked through the keyhole just for a minute though."

"Ah! did you see anything?"

"I saw that Mr. Irwin had Mrs. Selden in his arms and was kissing her."

Mildred threw her hands in the air with a gesture of fury.

"Curse her! Curse her! Does she forget her oath?"

James stared and made a mental note at the same time. He saw the promise of family trouble.

"When he went away, miss," he went on, "he said to tell you that he had been here and would come back this evening to see you."

Mildred fixed her burning eyes on his face.

"To beg his release," she hissed; "but though he begs forever he shall not have it. Where is Mrs. Selden?"

"She came out of the library about half an hour after Mr. Irwin went away, looking very white and ill. She went upstairs."

Mildred ground her white teeth together and, first thrusting another bill into the fellow's hand, swept up the staircase, muttering:

"It will not be for long. And, oh! my vengeance will be as complete as it will be terrible."

CHAPTER XXIII.

"I WILL NOT GIVE YOU UP."

What anguish Donald felt only Goldie could know, for her sufferings were kindred to his. How he passed the time after leaving the house he could not have told.

He had hoped he could calm his perturbed soul during the interval before seeing Mildred, but it seemed as if he grew more unsettled with each hour.

He tried to persuade himself that he would have no difficulty in making it clear to Mildred that their marriage would be a sin; but always there came the picture of Goldie taking that oath by the death-bed, and that in itself was enough to show him that it was a hopeless attempt on his part.

He did not dream of giving up, however. He clung to his resolve to keep his promise, if Mildred held him to it, but was strenuous in his determination to plead with her. So when evening came, he went to the house and asked to see her.

She was carefully dressed, and went down to him with a face full of joy. She had thought it all out, and had regained her self-control. She would play her part so that no one should suspect her.

"Oh, Donald!" she cried; as she entered the room

where he waited, "I wondered what had become of you. I am so glad to see you again, dear."

As if she did not notice the slight drawing back from her, she threw her arms about his neck and pressed a kiss upon his lips.

"I should have come before, Mildred," he said, gently unclasping her arms from his neck. "I know I have not done right."

"Do not speak of that, dear," she said. "You did what you pleased, and what pleases you must ever be right in my eyes."

It seemed to him that he would go mad if she continued to talk to him thus in accents of love, and he started in on his subject at once.

"Mildred," he said abruptly, "I came here for a specific purpose."

She knew that the thing she dreaded to hear was coming.

"Yes, Donald, dear," she said.

"I was here this afternoon; you knew that?"

"Yes, I knew that."

"Have you seen Goldie?"

"No; it was the servant who told me. Goldie has not come from her room this evening; she is suffering from a severe headache, I believe."

"Not headache, Mildred," he said quickly, "but heartache."

"Ah, yes! poor Goldie has felt the loss of my father more than I would have believed possible."

Donald waved his hand impatiently.

"It is not the dead but the living she mourns, and I must assume that you know it is so."

"How strangely you speak, Donald!"

"Not so strangely but you must understand me, Mildred. But I shall be more explicit; I came for that purpose. Mildred, why did you exact that oath from Goldie by the bedside of your dying father?"

A faint flush mounted to the cheeks of Mildred, but there was no other sign of her inward disturbance.

"Did she tell you of it, then, Donald? What a strange thing it was! But surely she did not say I exacted it? Why, I did not know what papa had made her promise to do until she called me over to them. It was he who exacted the oath, Donald. I suppose it was the fantasy of a dying man."

His eyes lighted up with sudden hope.

"You did not exact it, Mildred? It was all his doing?"

"Yes, indeed, Donald."

"Then—then you will absolve her from her oath, Mildred?" he cried.

Mildred looked as if she did not understand.

"I absolve her? Why, I cannot do that, Donald dear. No one can absolve her from it. But what

does it matter? I did not know it was weighing on her."

He clinched his hands impatiently.

"Can you not understand, Mildred? The oath was not fair. No one had the right to ask it of her. And you can absolve her."

"Oh, no, Donald, that is not possible. It was an oath taken in the sight of Heaven, and only Heaven can absolve her. But surely it cannot matter. It seemed a strange thing in papa, but I supposed it was no more than a fancy of a dying man."

Donald took several paces across the room and returned again.

"Perhaps I do not make myself understood. I will be more explicit. I may not use the proper terms. I will try to do so. It may be that you cannot absolve her from her oath, but you can make it of no consequence if you will."

"If I will!" she repeated reproachfully. "As if there was anything I would not do for our dear little Goldie. What can I do, Donald?"

"The oath, I believe, was that she should not come between you and me?"

"That was the substance of it, at least."

"Mildred, a marriage without love on both sides is wicked," he said.

She understood him, but pretended not to.

"Are you not a little hard on Goldie?" she asked.

"I think she cared a little for papa. Of course he was old and his money must have been a terrible temptation to her. But consider that she was only a factory girl, with nothing better than a life of hard work before her. How can you blame her? I do not. What she did was natural."

"She did not marry him for his money," he cried angrily. "She was driven to do it by the perfidy of the man she loved. His seeming perfidy, at least."

"Ah!" was all Mildred said.

"Mildred, that man was I. I loved her, and she loved me, but I was insensate enough, wicked enough not to believe her good enough for me, and so to be sure that I would not in the madness of my love ask her to be my wife, I did you the wrong of proposing to you."

Mildred's eyes were flaming. It was awful to be told in plain words that he did not love her at all, and did love Goldie. She had known it before. She had been sure of it, but it was almost more than she could bear to be told so to her face, and by him.

By a terrible effort she maintained her command of herself. Not for a moment did she dream of letting him go from her.

"Donald," she said, "you are not yourself. I fear you have been ill."

He stared at her. Had he not made himself plain?

"Ill!" he repeated vehemently. "I have been near to madness because of the wrong I have done. I have wandered I know not whither these days past, trying to understand myself, and to know what I should do. I thought I had lost my darling, and I knew I loved her and only her."

"Then I learned that your father was dead, and that she was free once more. Was it not like a message from Heaven? I determined at once to come here and confess everything to you and to her."

"I said to myself that you would release me, and she would give me back the love I had forfeited. So I saw her to-day, and she told me of her oath, and reminded me of my betrothal to you. I told her you would release me, and that that act would release her, too. You will do this, Mildred?"

"What did she answer to you, Donald?"

"She said you would not release me, but she was mistaken, was she not?"

"She was not mistaken, Donald; she was right. I will never release you. I love you, and I shall wed you. In time you will love me as you did, and she will wed another. Donald, I will not give you up."

CHAPTER XXIV.

TRUE TO HER OATH.

Donald Irwin did not really know the nature of the girl to whom he was betrothed, or he would not have been so bitterly disappointed as he was when he listened to her firm words of refusal to give him back his freedom.

He was almost dumfounded when she spoke so positively. It had not occurred to him as possible that any woman would care to hold a man who confessed his love for another.

For a few moments he gazed at her as if he expected her to open her lips to recall the words she had spoken. But she did not speak at all. She had thought the matter all out, and was not going to give up the man she loved with a passion which had become little, if anything, short of insanity.

"Mildred," he said hoarsely, "you could not have understood me. I tell you I love Goldie, and can never, never love you or any other than her."

"Donald," she answered, veiling her flaming eyes with their coal-black lashes, "I did not misunderstand you. You tell me that you do not love me, and ask me to give you up to another. I answer you that I will not give you up."

He strode across the room, and back again as if he knew not what he was doing; he stopped in front of her, and his voice was husky with restrained emotion as he said:

"Mildred, do you know what you are saying? Do you comprehend what the consequences of your determination will be?"

"I have thought of everything," she answered in a low tone; and then, as he was about to speak again, burst forth as if she could not restrain herself: "Yes, I have thought of everything, Donald; but most of all I have remembered that you voluntarily asked me to be your wife."

"I was mad," he murmured.

She made a gesture with her hand.

"Mad!" she cried passionately; "and what are you now? Consider, Donald, how I am placed! I did not lead you on by coquetry or by any wile; you came to me of your own will and asked me to be your wife."

"There are scores of worthier men who would wed you," he said, as if he could not reason longer.

"But there is no other man in all the world I can ever love. When you asked me to be your wife, you gave me the right to pour out from my surcharged heart all the vehement love I felt for you. To give you up would be worse than death to me.

"I cannot, will not, give you up. Oh, Donald!" and

ere he could stay her movements, she had thrown her arms about his neck, "I love you with such a love as surely no other woman is capable of. Do not try to break from me. Give me your hand, and the love will grow in your heart until it equals mine.

"You think you love Goldie because she is pretty in a milk-and-rose, babyish way; but she is no fit mate for you, my Donald. It is I who can most worthily bear your name. And, oh, Donald, I love you with all my heart and soul. For you I would give up all the world. Donald, dear, fight against an infatuation which would lead you to break your word. Remember that by solemn oath she is pledged not to be yours. Think how I love you!"

Impassioned as her words were, her voice and manner made them even more surcharged with passion, so that they seemed to throb and vibrate with the emotion that shook her whole being.

Donald listened, and knew that she had given him all her heart; that she had merged her life into his and could never again love another. He knew this without being conscious of the fact, for his heart was cold toward her, and beat only for Goldie.

He was like one who does an act of madness, while knowing of what he is guilty. He knew he was bound to her, but his heart cried for Goldie.

He unloosed the arms that twined with such loving passion about his neck, and put her from him with more force than he was aware of.

"Why reason with one who is deaf to all cries but those of an aching, love-maddened heart?" he said, hoarsely. "You tell me of your love, but I can only answer with a story of my own.

"You tell me that I am pledged to you and that she is bound by an oath. Yes, I am pledged to you; but is such a pledge one that should be kept?

"You think I would learn to love you; I tell you, Mildred, I would hate you worse than ever man hated woman before, if I were tied to you by such bonds as those of wedlock.

"Her oath! You can break that. Give me my freedom, Mildred, and her oath is dissolved. Surely you would not have me wed you to hate you."

"At any cost," she said between her closed teeth, "I will wed you, Donald. 'Aye! I would wed you though I knew destruction would follow the next moment, though your hate would end in my blood, though an eternity of woe were my doom for it. Donald, you must be mine.

"I will not dissolve the oath that binds her, nor will I give you back your plighted troth. You are mine before Heaven, and mine you shall be to the end."

She could hardly refrain from bursting forth into a tirade of hate and envenomed fury against Goldie, but she had enough self-control not to do so, though in her heart she was all the while vowing the direst vengeance on the innocent girl.

Donald placed his hands before his eyes as if to hide a vision that came up before them, then with a vehement gesture he ejaculated:

"I will not wed you, Mildred. It would be a crime far greater than the breaking of my word to you. It would be worse than the breaking of her oath to your father. What right had he to enact such an oath? None, none; and she shall not abide by it. She shall give her hand to me, who already has her heart. I will make her mine in spite of you."

Mildred caught him by the arm, and detained him as he was turning away. The red color burned in her olive cheeks like spots of flame, and her voice vibrated with passion.

"Donald!" she said, "beware what you do! You are not only bringing on yourself the curse of Heaven, but you are rousing against yourself and her the worst passions of the arch-fiend himself."

He recoiled before her terrific expression, but broke from her restraining grasp, and strode to the door.

"I will wed her," he said hoarsely—"I would do it

though the gates of the bottomless pit yawned at my feet. Our love is appointed by fate, and cannot be subdued. Our hands were joined in heaven, and cannot be torn asunder by a base trick concocted in the brain of a scheming woman, and forced upon a shrinking girl at the deathbed of one who held no claim upon her!"

He burst from the room as he spoke, and Mildred heard him going up the great staircase, and did not doubt that he was going to see if he could not persuade Goldie to view the matter as he saw it.

She raised her bloodshot eyes upward as if she would see through the ceiling to where the lovers would be, and shook her clinched hands.

"My bitter—bitter curses on her for what she has done to me!" she hissed; "but I will see to it that he never enjoys what he denies to me."

The blackest and most awful thoughts were in her heart. But she would not be precipitate—she would not destroy her chance of a terrible vengeance on Goldie by betraying herself.

She waited only to compose herself, and then glided from the room and up the stairs. She must know what passed between Goldie and Donald.

He had entered the little parlor attached to Goldie's

apartments, and was talking to her he loved. Mildred could hear their words from the hall.

"Goldie," she heard him say, "she will not release me; but yet you must consent to be mine. Heaven brought us together, and it would be a crime to remain apart."

"Donald," was the answer; given in low but penetrating tones, "it cannot be. Not for your happiness or mine will I break my oath to the dying man. But, ah! go from me, and do not tempt me further, for if I should yield in an evil moment of weakness, sorrow and woe eternal would be my portion. Go, Donald! and make her your wife!"

"I will not, Goldie. You and only you must bear my name."

"Donald, if you would hold the love you have won, you will act the only part an honorable man can; you will wed her, though you cannot love her."

"I would hate her!"

"Have you said that to her, Donald?" was the eager query, as if a ray of hope had illumined her despair.

"I have told her, and she only insists that still I must wed her."

"Donald," said poor little Goldie, wearily, "all this is killing me. I cannot bear it much longer. I cannot struggle against you forever, but I can die, and I shall

pray Heaven that I may die before I am tempted to yield to your wishes."

"You cannot resist fate, Goldie," was his gloomy answer.

"Fate!" she cried, in an anguished tone. "If it was fate that brought us together, who shall say that it was not fate that tore us apart? Ah, Donald, it was in your power to bring happiness to us both, and you threw the opportunity away! This is perhaps your punishment."

"I was wicked, but that is no reason why you should be made to suffer."

"Reason! why speak of reason? It is fate, and we must bow to it."

"Goldie dear, why not see this as I see it? Cast aside your fears, and wed me. We will go far away from here where——"

"Donald, you but make my anguish harder to bear. I will not wed you."

"Then," he said vehemently, "I will wait for you until Mildred is dead, or wedded to another."

Goldie shook her head feebly, while the great tears gathered in her eyes.

"That would not be removing my obligations. I swore that I would not stand between you two; and Heaven helping me, I will not. Wed her, Donald, and give me what little peace is possible for me, or leave

her unwed, and let me feel my life a curse. Say that you will wed her, Donald!"

He turned away and covered his face with his hands. Then suddenly he cried out:

"I will wed her because you bid me; but the weight of two broken hearts shall be on her soul."

CHAPTER XXV.

"YOU WILL WED ME NOW!"

Mildred glided from the spot where she had stood to listen, a look of hate and triumph on her face.

Another would have been grateful to Goldie for the high and lofty spirit which had animated her to give up her own happiness, and accept misery for her portion rather than break her oath. But in the heart of Mildred was only the blackest hate and most violent passions.

She believed that Donald would wed her now; but even after what had happened, she did not trust Goldie.

"She gives him up now," she muttered; "but she confessed herself that she would not always be able to resist. She said it to hold him from keeping his word to me. She hoped he would understand the subtle meaning of her words, and strive on until he forced a consent from her seemingly reluctant lips. The little hypocrite!"

She had retreated to her own room, and was gliding up and down it with the silent steps of a tigress, when her maid entered to say that Donald asked to see her.

"Oh, that I could play my part to win his love as well as his hand!" she murmured.

She bade her maid tell him she would be instantly down, and then made a new toilet, which she hoped would at least soften his heart toward her.

But when she went down and saw him pacing the floor of the reception-room like a caged lion, she knew that his heart was filled with anger.

And when he turned on her at the sound of her footsteps, and she saw the expression of his face, her heart sank.

"Mildred," he said harshly, "I left you a few minutes ago saying I would not wed you. I thought I could make Goldie see as I did, but she will not. She insists that I wed you. So I have sent for you to say that I will fulfill my promise to you and make you my wife."

"Oh, Donald!" she murmured, gliding closer to him as if she would lay a caressing hand on his arm.

He stepped back with a look of intense scorn and dislike.

"Do not touch me. I tell you I will wed you, but also I must tell you that I shall always hate you. I shall never forgive you for separating me from my love. Will you dare to wed me, knowing this?"

"I would wed you, Donald, though I knew death would be my instant fate. For hate me though you may, Donald, I love you with all my heart and soul."

He was not touched by her words, for in a vague

way he could seem to comprehend that they were not the words of such a woman as any man could love.

He could not deny that in a way she had justice on her side. And yet he seemed to recognize the dark, turbulent soul that animated the passionate creature.

Perhaps, if he could really have read her soul aright, not even the prayers and entreaties of Goldie would have held him to his promise. He would have felt toward her more as one instinctively feels toward the venomous reptile that crawls in all its glittering, sinuous beauty toward the unconscious object of its attack.

"Have it as you will, then," he said curtly. "I will wed you."

"Were it not better," she asked pleadingly, "to set a time?"

He laughed bitterly.

"And do you think I will set the time? Does the condemned man say when his doom shall be?"

A flush of shame and partly of anger rose to her cheeks as this scornful answer fell on her ears, but she did not flinch from her purpose.

"Will you abide by my wish?" she asked in a low tone, her eyes flashing with a strange look.

"You shall do as you will," he replied. "It is for you to say, and for me only to acquiesce."

"It is a hard task you set me, Donald."

He shrugged his shoulders and answered in the curt way that had so suddenly come to him:

"You need not perform it. You know that."

"But it must be performed," she said; "and if you will not, I will, though it is a strange thing for a maiden to play such a part."

His eyes flamed angrily.

"Your part all through has been unmaidenly, if you will force me to say so. Shall I receive word from you when the day is to be? I would prefer not to come here again."

"My mind is already made up," she responded. "I can tell you now."

He looked at her with cold inquiry, but did not speak.

"Will you accept my choice of a time?" she asked.

He did not note her strange expression. He was only thinking her unwomanly and unlovely. He wondered how he ever could have dreamed of making her his wife.

"I have told you to set the time," he answered contemptuously; "I shall not find fault with it."

Her eyes gleamed strangely and her bosom heaved tumultuously as she said in a voice that was husky with emotion and suppressed passion:

"The time I set is now—this very hour!"

He started and stared at her with fiery eyes; then

opened his lips as if he would speak to repudiate her decision.

She watched him with eager gaze and parted lips, as if she feared that he would repent of his willingness, but he checked the words that seemingly had formed on his lips, and with a curl of his lip and a contemptuous shrug of his broad shoulders, said:

"So be it! now. I am at your disposal!"

She swallowed a lump that had risen in her throat, and with a cry of joy she could not suppress ran toward him.

"Oh, Donald, you will go with me now? You will wed me this very hour?"

"Why should I delay the evil hour? As well now as any other time. It will not matter either to you or to me."

She knew there was a hidden meaning in his words, but she was too full of the affair before her to study out what that meaning was.

She ran from the room, and he could hear her order the carriage and then speed swiftly up the stairs.

"Goldie," he murmured, raising his eyes toward where he knew her to be, "I am keeping my promise, and obeying you, but if misery and despair come to all of us in consequence, Heaven make your burden as light as possible. I see no other way, or I would not adopt this one."

CHAPTER XXVI.

A WIFE ONLY IN NAME!

"Get me out my white satin gown!" Mildred said to her maid, as she swept into her dressing room, her black eyes glittering like stars.

The girl stared at her, but did not dare offer any remark, though she did not yet believe that her mistress had any thought of wearing the garment she had called for. She went swiftly and drew the gown from its place, wondering what use her mistress would put it to.

"Quickly!" Mildred cried impatiently. "How you creep! and I am in a hurry. Get me all that goes with the gown, for I am going to wear it."

"Wear it!" gasped the girl, staring now as if she thought Mildred was taking leave of her senses.

"Yes, wear it," cried Mildred, her voice rising in a shrill note of triumph. "Do you think I would be wedded in black? It is unlucky to wear black at one's wedding."

"Married, Miss Mildred!"

"That is what I said, girl. Come! be swift, or Mr. Irwin will be impatient at being kept waiting."

"You are going to marry Mr. Irwin, miss? How

sudden! But I am sure every one will wish you luck and congratulate you."

"Yes, yes. We were engaged, you know, before poor papa died. See, here is the ring. But of course you knew that. Papa had told him that he wished me married at once, it seems, and so dear Donald has persuaded me to wed him now."

The girl wondered that her mistress should suddenly become so communicative, but the truth did not dawn on her.

She hastened her preparations for the toilet, and ere many minutes had elapsed, Mildred was arrayed in white.

She was beautiful. No one could gainsay that, and she knew it as she looked in the huge mirror that occupied one corner of the dressing room.

Mildred laughed feverishly, and told the girl that she might take the new mourning dress she had had made.

"For," she said, with a laugh rather of triumph than of joy, "I shall wear black no more, short as the time is. It would not be right to Donald."

She was ready now to go down to Donald, and she went as she was, unable yet to realize that she could make no impression on him.

"When he sees me thus," she murmured to herself, "he surely will think I am beautiful, and worthy of his

love. Men love beauty, and he shall always see me so. Then he will learn in time to admire and love me again."

But before she went down, there came into her brain another idea: She would go to Goldie, and under the pretense of acquainting her with the news of the approaching wedding, would gloat over her misery.

So she bade her maid prepare everything so that she could throw her wraps on in a moment, and then glided along the hallway and tapped at the door of Goldie's room.

She did not wait for permission to enter, but burst in with a false smile on her face, and glided over to the darkened corner where Goldie lay, her face in her hands.

"Goldie, Goldie!" she cried; "forgive me for arousing you if you were sleeping, but you must tell me how I look. See!"

Goldie brushed the tears from her eyes, and looked wearily around at Mildred; starting back at the strange sight of the white garments, as if the latter were dressed for a ball.

Her eyes swept over the imperious beauty from her head to her feet and back again. Then she asked in a voice that was scarcely audible:

"Why are you dressed thus?"

"Tell me first that I look well. Say that you think me beautiful!"

"You are beautiful, Mildred. I think you are the most beautiful woman I ever saw. But why are you dressed thus?"

"For my wedding, Goldie."

A little cry escaped Goldie's lips, and she sank back with her little hand upon her heart.

"Your wedding?"

"Yes; for my wedding, Goldie, dear. Donald has asked me to wed him at once, and I could not refuse him. Will you not come along and be a witness for me?"

Goldie turned her face away and moaned:

"Go! Go! May you be happy with him, Mildred. I cannot go with you. Oh, go, go!"

A wicked smile of fierce joy passed over the darkly beautiful face. She had tortured her victim, and it made her happy.

She went down to the reception-room again, expecting to see Donald pacing the floor as he had been doing before; but he was standing in front of the window, with his coat on and his hat in his hand.

She could not see his face, his back being toward her, but she spoke his name gently, and he turned deliberately around, as if ready to go with her.

She expected his eyes to light up at the sight of her

beautiful toilet, and she studied his face eagerly, but it was like that of a graven image. He saw that she had made herself beautiful, but he looked coldly at her for a moment, and then said grimly:

"I am ready at any time."

A pang of pain shot to Mildred's heart and pierced it. She felt as if she had shot one precious shaft only to see it fall to the ground without effect.

"The carriage waits," she said faintly, and glided miserably from the room.

She composed her face ere she reached the hall, where her maid awaited her.

Donald looked on without making any show of assisting her. Her maid was sufficient for the task of putting on the cloak, so why should he pretend a gallantry he did not feel?

When the cloak was on and Mildred was ready, he offered her his arm in a cold, hard way that made the color leap to her cheeks and then disappear, leaving a dull pallor.

It was she who told him the address of the clergyman she had chosen to perform the ceremony, and Donald only repeated the address after her to the footman.

Mildred was suffering a terrible humiliation, and it seemed to her raging spirit as if she must have hated

him, were it not that Goldie afforded her a better object for her fury to vent itself on.

"I will make her suffer a thousand times all that he makes me suffer now," she murmured to herself.

She spoke to him and he answered in grim monosyllables. Even her hard spirit quailed at the thought of such a wedding as this promised to be, but there was no thought of hanging back.

She would first make him irrevocably hers, and win his love afterward, though she could not repress a shudder as she glanced furtively at his set, rigid face.

It looked like the countenance of one who had bidden farewell to every human emotion. It was stern and implacable, too, as if it hid a hard, bitter purpose.

When the carriage stopped, and she saw that the house of the clergyman was reached, she laid her hand on his arm, and pleaded:

"Donald, will not you speak to the clergyman?"

He looked down into her face without the quiver of a muscle, and answered coldly:

"The marriage is of your making. If it had been of mine, I would do as you ask. As it is, you must tell the clergyman all you wish him to know. It will not matter to me if you tell him naught."

Oh, the bitter, stinging humiliation of her position! But Mildred only bit her lip until the blood all but

spurted from the pressure, and started toward the house, murmuring:

"I will do that. I will do anything to win you, Donald. There is no humiliation I will not suffer to call you by the name of husband. I will be your slave, and win your love in spite of you."

He did not answer, but followed unmoved to the door.

They were admitted into the house, and were taken into the parlors of the rectory, where they were presently joined by the venerable clergyman.

He looked at them both, and seemed to divine their purpose there. He smiled benignly, and looked at Donald again, as if expecting him to reveal the affair that had brought them thither.

Mildred hoped he would take pity on her and speak, but he only answered the astonished clergyman's look by a stony stare. Then Mildred gathered courage to say in a low tone:

"We have come to be married, sir. May we ask you to officiate?"

The clergyman turned to her, and then back again to Donald, saying wonderingly:

"You have come to be wedded to this lady, sir?"

"Yes."

"I beg you will hasten," Mildred murmured nervously.

The good man stared and thought he had never seen so strange a pair on such an errand before. But there was no reason why he should refuse if there was no obstacle to their union, so he procured his blank form and asked all the prescribed questions.

They were answered satisfactorily, if somewhat curtly by Donald, and then witnesses were brought in.

Donald stood up by the side of Mildred when the clergyman told him it was time for him to do so, and the ceremony was proceeded with.

Surely so strange a wedding never was before. The good clergyman said afterward that he felt far more as if he were reading the funeral service.

But Donald never failed in his responses, icily as they were spoken, and the two were made one; though when the blessing on them was pronounced it could be seen that on the lips of the groom there was a sneer, as if he derided the notion of a blessing on such a union.

Troubled and doubtful the clergyman pronounced them man and wife, and when Mildred looked pleadingly at Donald as if asking him to salute her as his wife, it was the old man who summoned up courage to say:

"Accept my congratulations, Mrs. Irwin."

Then he kissed her in a fatherly way and drew back.

"Donald!" murmured Mildred, piteously.

He looked sternly at her, and held his hand out to keep her from coming nearer to him as she seemed about to do.

"Stop! You are my wife in the eyes of the law, and can bear my name. You have certain rights in my property according to the law also. I will learn what they are and see that you have all that is legally yours. I shall then have done all that is required of me by my promise.

"You are my wife, Mildred. You are my wife because I had asked you to be such, and in spite of the fact that I told you I did not and never could love you.

"Hush! do not speak! These good people have seen you made my wife, and it is before them that I must say what I desire to.

"You are my wife, and I say too that, wife though you are, you shall be so only in name. And now we part forever. Farewell!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

"I KNOW HOW TO AVENGE MYSELF!"

After uttering the word farewell to Mildred, Donald cast one grim look at her pale, imploring face, and strode from the room.

"Sir! my dear sir!" ejaculated the clergyman, while Mildred, with a gasp of misery, only held out her hands toward him.

"How awful! how cruel!" cried the good clergyman's wife.

"He is mad!" murmured the daughter, who had been one of the witnesses.

Donald stopped in the hall, and turned as if to utter one last word.

No one in the room spoke, so much were they affected by consternation and a painful curiosity to hear what he would say.

He had not heard their comments on his conduct, and if he had heard them, it is unlikely that he would have given them enough weight to care to answer them.

"Mildred," he said sternly, "it may occur to you that time will conquer my hatred of you, and will dispose me to feel differently toward you. Do not de-

lude yourself with any such vain thought. I shall never return to you. Farewell forever!"

"Oh, Donald, my dearest love!" she wailed.

He did not hear, and if he had would not have heeded. With his last word he strode from the house, and the only response to her anguished words was the slamming of the street door.

"He is gone!" she cried wildly.

She made a few steps toward the door as if to follow him, and then the hopelessness of doing so seemed to overcome her, and with a low moan she sank to the floor.

The good clergyman could only reach her in time to save her from injuring herself in the fall, while his sympathetic wife hastened to her side with words of pity and concern.

"Oh, how cruel and wicked he is!" she murmured. "My dear lady, do not despair, he cannot mean what he says."

"He does, he does!" wailed Mildred. "I shall never see him again."

"He must be out of his mind to desert so beautiful a bride as you!" the girl cried, as she bent over Mildred to render her the assistance of her hand in arising.

"I never knew so strange a happening," the old lady said; "this is indeed a wild romance."

"Tell us what is wrong, madam," the clergyman

said. "It may be that we can give you helpful advice."

But Mildred's weakness was past, though her anguish was no less poignant for that. She pushed them aside haughtily and ungraciously as her nature moved her to do, and a fierce, vindictive expression distorted her beautiful face.

"Advice! I need no advice. I know how to avenge myself."

"Do not speak of revenge," murmured the clergyman solemnly. "It will recoil on yourself. It is ever so."

Mildred laughed wildly and scornfully. Her brain was already reveling in the thought of how she would visit on the unsuspecting and defenseless head of Goldie all the venom she had been storing up through the days and hours of jealousy and hate!

"Not speak of revenge!" she sneered. "But it is your profession to speak so. What would you say if your daughter had been so treated? But, pshaw! why do I tell you these things? There are other ears tingling to hear what I have to tell."

She threw on her bonnet and cloak with slight regard to how they might sit on her now, and swept fiercely toward the door.

The girl shrank back at the sight of her dark, venge-

ful face; but the clergyman laid his hand restrainingly and rebukingly on her arm.

"One moment! I cannot let you go without a word of——"

Mildred turned savagely on him and threw his hand off. Then she broke into a wild, sneering laugh, and cried out:

"Ah, yes! I understand why you detain me. My loving husband, in leaving, forgot to pay you for your good offices. He left it for me to do that. There! you shall not say that I did not pay well for my happiness!"

She threw him a roll of bills, the value of which she neither knew nor cared to know; and then, with another burst of fierce laughter, swept from the room.

And the street door slammed after her as it had slammed after her husband, ere they could collect themselves.

"That is an ill-omened marriage," whispered the wife.

"I will not take the money," the clergyman said in a low tone.

He stooped hurriedly and picked up the roll, discovering as he did so that it was made up of five and ten-dollar bills.

He ran to the door and threw it open, determined

to run after Mildred and force her to take back the money, sorely as he needed it himself.

But Mildred had leaped into her carriage and had given so fierce an order to the footman to close the door and drive home that already she was flying down the street.

The good man stared after her, realizing that he would be unable to make her hear, should he call, and that it would be the height of folly for him to attempt to follow her.

He returned to the house and placed the money on the table, murmuring, as he sunk into a chair:

"I was too late, mother. What shall we do with the money?"

His good wife thought of their many needs, reflected that the money was at least honestly come by, though so much in excess of the ordinary fee.

"Father," she said, timidly, "I am sure no harm can come of our acceptance of the money. She gave it freely, and knowing what she gave. If the wedding be not a happy one, it is not your fault. You are innocent, and the money is ours fairly."

He looked up and his eyes rested on the tempting roll of money. There were so many good uses it could be put to.

"Keep it, then, mother, and do with it what you will. The fees, you know, are yours."

"Then I shall have a new dress," cried the girl, joyously.

"And your father shall have a new coat," said the good woman.

"And you shall have the warm coat you have been needing all winter, mother dear," the girl cried eagerly.

"I am afraid there is not enough for all that," said the old man, shaking his head gravely.

The girl was eagerly and breathlessly counting the bills as he spoke, and her eyes grew big with wonder as she proceeded.

"Not enough!" she cried at last. "Why, there is enough to buy all those things and to send old Mrs. Perkins her winter's coal, to say nothing of paying rent for half a dozen we know of. There are two hundred and thirty dollars here!"

And so out of the misery and savage pain of the deserted bride came so much good, while her agony in that little room became to those three but a matter of wonder.

She, meanwhile, forgetting them, and thinking of nothing but the scorn of Donald and her own hatred of innocent Goldie, was hastening home, urging herself on to the execution of those terrible plots which were already matured in her brain.

She was filled with a sense of shame and bitter anger, but she forced herself to dwell calmly on the

fact that there must be some sort of explanation to Goldie and others as would save her from open ridicule and disgrace.

So she lay back amid the luxurious cushions of the carriage, and with grinding teeth and knitted brows thought it all over.

She no longer deluded herself with the vain hope that some day she would win Donald back to her, and it seemed to her that what had once been love in her heart was now turning to hate.

Yes, she could hate Donald now, and it gave an added zest to her hideous scheme of vengeance that she knew how he would suffer when he knew how his love had writhed in deepest anguish.

"We will delay our departure for the country no longer," she muttered. "Everything is ripe for the plot to work, and the sooner her misery begins, the sooner will this bitter sting in my heart become allayed."

She did not doubt that the men on the box were quietly laughing at her, with a shrewd guess at the truth, or a part of it. But neither they nor anyone else could arrive at the whole truth, and she had an ingenious lie prepared to deceive everybody.

She could not tell what Donald would do, but she did not doubt that he would hasten away from the

city to immure himself, perhaps, in his own distant and lonely home in the South.

He would not be there to deny her story, nor did she believe he would do so were he to remain near.

"But he will not stay here now," she said to herself. "He will return at once to Forestmere, there to await my death. Ah!" and she laughed with Satanic fury, "it will be neither my death nor hers that will come to put an end to his longing. It will be a worse tale than that."

It would have seemed impossible for one bearing such a weight of fury and pain to put on an appearance of smiling happiness, but Mildred did it as the carriage stopped at the door of her house.

She stepped out when the footman opened the door, and with a graciousness as unusual as it was unexpected she said to him:

"Mr. Irwin was called suddenly away, and will not join me until I am in the country; but that is no reason why you and the other servants should not make merry in honor of our wedding. I will send you down a sum of money with which you all must try to purchase something with which to remember this happy day."

"Thank you, miss—Mrs. Irwin, I mean."

"It has a strange sound at first, has it not?" she laughed with unwonted familiarity.

She ran up the steps, and was admitted into the house ere the footman found tongue to murmur to the driver:

"She sang a different tune when she came flying out of the parsonage and ordered us to drive home. And Mr. Irwin did not look so blessed happy when he flew down the street alone."

"Maybe it's the new style," laughed the footman.

"New or old," rejoined the footman, "it's all the same to me if she sends down enough boodle to the kitchen."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE STORY OF THE DESERTED BRIDE.

Mildred went at once to her room, where she gaily told her maid the same story that had done service with the footman. It was the story which the servants were to know, and which she had no doubt would be known among all her friends ere noon of the next day; for she was not a stranger to the fact that it is through the kitchen that most news is carried to the boudoirs of wealth.

She bore herself in the sight of the wondering maid with an appearance of happiness that deceived even that astute creature. And when she had been aided to change her gown for one more suitable for the house, she gave the maid a sum of money, with instructions to divide it equitably among the servants.

Then she dismissed her and locked herself into her room that she might for a moment relax, and give way to the bitterness of her humiliation and anger.

For she knew that Goldie would be waiting to know that the marriage, which was the knell of her dearest hopes, had been performed.

And it was so. She who had been a bride and a widow within so brief a space was waiting in her room

with anguished heart, but dry eyes, for the return of the wedded pair.

Mildred had suffered much in the heart-struggle that had been going on during the hours past; but the very fury and anger and hate in which she had indulged had taken from her pain the pang that had been in poor Goldie's.

Goldie's suffering was less vehement; but it was deeper as it was purer and more resigned, for she had at least the satisfaction of knowing that she had done her full duty as she saw it.

She no longer had any hope but in Heaven, and if it had been right she would gladly have parted the thread of her life in order that she might no longer be connected with a world which could hold only sorrow and woe for her.

It was terrible pain to remain there in her room waiting while the man she loved with a passionate adoration was being wedded to another.

It seemed to her that it would have been easier to bear if she could have known that Mildred was more worthy, and that Donald's life was to be the happier for the terrible sacrifice that was being made. But to know that he was suffering no less than herself, was in itself an agony not to be computed.

She was giving him up for the happiness and good of no one; but, as her heart distinctly told her, for the

misery and woe of all concerned. For she knew that Mildred could not possibly be happy with one who gave her his hand while his heart was unalterably another's.

"Ah, Heaven!" she moaned again and again as she buried her face in the silken folds of the cushion of the divan, "why must it be so? Donald and I could have been so happy together. Ah! at least take this wretched soul out of this life of misery."

At first she had been able to weep; but it seemed now that the tears would not come and relieve her surcharged heart of its weight of woe.

So she waited, pacing the floor, gazing out of the window with unseeing eyes at the people who passed, or lying with convulsed bosom on the divan, whose rest she gladly would have made eternal.

Then she saw the carriage drive up and saw Mildred dismount alone, but with a gayety that sent a new pang to the tender heart.

If Mildred were happy, Donald must be kind. A cry of misery broke from her lips. Not that she would have wished it otherwise, but that it meant so much.

Then she realized how she had betrayed herself to herself, and a flush of shame mounted to her brow.

"Oh, miserable, that I am!" she moaned; "have I secretly cherished the hope that he would continue to love me after wedding her?"

The thought that such a thing might really be so,

added to her misery, and she sunk into a chair to await a visit from Mildred, a prey to remorse and humiliation.

She never doubted that Mildred would come to tell her about the wedding; for she knew in her secret heart that her enemy reveled in her pain and misery.

She understood this instinctively, though without for a moment suspecting the hidden depths of wickedness and fury that animated the fierce nature of the girl, who had once accused her of murder.

There are natures so pure and innocent as to feel without being conscious of evil in others. Such a nature was that of the beautiful girl who had been so suddenly snatched from the loom to be placed in a palace.

There came a knock at her door, which she recognized. It was Mildred, come no doubt to triumph over her.

She collected herself as she bade her enter, determined to bear herself so that the other should have no just cause to reproach her.

Mildred entered, fully aware, despite any disguise Goldie might assume, how the latter was suffering, and with a mind made up to torture her ere she revealed the truth, which would give her any cause for rejoicing.

For Mildred would not, or could not, understand

the nobler nature of the girl she had striven so hard to injure, and whom she hated with so deadly a force.

"Congratulate me, dear Goldie!" she cried gayly, "Give Mrs. Donald Irwin your warmest wishes for happiness."

Goldie swallowed the misery that leaped for expression to her lips.

"I do congratulate you, Mildred, and I wish you every happiness."

Mildred's eyes flamed with joy as she watched the beautiful face and read the agony that lay beneath the mask.

"Thank you, dear," she murmured. "I know that it is hard for you to utter such words, and I hope you will find the strength to forgive my selfish joy; but as Donald himself said to me as we stood together when the blessed words were uttered that made us one, the human heart is elastic and will soon recover."

"I hope his words are the very truth, Mildred," murmured Goldie in a low tone.

"I am sure they are. He felt after the ceremony was over that it would be so in his case. He had confessed to me his love for you, but when he turned to press a loving kiss on my lips when I was his wife, he murmured in my ear: 'It may take me a little while to forget her in your love, dear; but from what I feel now, I know the time is not far off.'"

"That is as it should be," Goldie murmured, unable to realize what a hideous falsehood the other was telling. "I hope in my innermost heart that he will learn to love you as a man should love his wife."

Her humble acceptance of her fate made Mildred long to take her by the milk-white throat and choke back the sweet words she spoke.

"I am so very happy in spite of everything," she said, quelling her fury by a supreme effort.

"In spite of what, Mildred?" Goldie asked sweetly.

"Did you not know that Donald had not returned with me?" she asked.

"Yes, I saw you alight from the carriage without him."

"And did you not wonder at that?"

"I wondered, but I saw you happy, and I dismissed the thought from my mind."

"Dismissed what thought?" demanded Mildred with a laugh, which she intended to be merry, but which in fact rang with the fierceness that was in her heart. "Did you think that he had deserted me at the moment of making me his bride?"

Goldie flashed a wondering look into the flaming eyes, and for a moment the hope she could not kill rose in her breast and betrayed itself in her violet orbs.

"I—I did not harbor such a thought," she whispered.

"But you do now," came furiously from the red lips of the other, and if hate could kill, Goldie would have died under the envenomed glance of her enemy.

As it was she started back with a terror that was hardly undefined. It seemed as if she had been given a sudden, passing glance into the wild, furious soul of Mildred.

But the latter saw how her unguarded expression had startled the gentle Goldie and was quick to force a laugh and to say:

"What an absurd idea that would be! And yet he has deserted me, though in a loving, tender way that makes me love him the more."

"Deserted you?" queried Goldie in a low tone.

"That is hardly the word," Mildred said gayly, as if the matter were but a trifling one. "After we were wedded, he took me in his arms and pressed a kiss upon my lips, saying in his noble, tender way: 'Mildred, I have wedded you according to my promise, and because of Goldie's oath. I feel that in a short time I can love you as a husband should love his wife. Until that time I ask your permission to return to my Southern home alone.'"

"And you answered him?" Goldie gasped.

"I bade him go. I told him that I would prefer that

it should be so. I was so sure from his tender caress that already he was learning to love me as he had done at first.

"He kissed me again at that, and said he would go to Forestmere and put it in order for his bride, promising me that I would feel no less happy when at last I dwelt in his ancestral home than if I went there with him at once. So you see, dear Goldie, I am to wait until he either comes or sends for me, and for the present I am as much a widow as you."

Goldie raised her great eyes to heaven and her lips moved as if asking for the necessary strength to bear her burden of woe.

Mildred watched her with compressed lips and glittering eyes; but when the other looked at her again, there was a smile on the red lips, and the gleaming eyes were veiled by the long lashes.

"Could you be ready to leave to-night for my country home?" she asked Goldie.

"As well to-night as any time," Goldie responded. "I believe there is nothing more for me to do here."

"To-night, then!" said Mildred, going to the door. "And to-morrow you will awake amid new scenes."

She closed the door, and the expression that leaped into her dark face would have frightened Goldie, had she seen it, as much as the muttered words had she heard them.

"Yes, you will awake amid new scenes, and to the beginning of dishonor, disgrace and a lost beauty. Ah! to see you stand before Donald Irwin, my husband, that he may look on your hideous face, and feel that it is but the mirror of a soul equally marred."

CHAPTER XXIX.

A FIENDISH PLOTTER.

Red Oak in summer, when the sun shone brightly, and the trees were covered with green and filled with twittering birds, was a charming place. But in the dead of winter, when the trees were bare, and the wind souged through the limbs, it was bleak and forbidding.

There are country places, charming alike winter and summer, but Red Oak was not one of these; and Goldie shuddered when she looked up at the dull, gray-stone mansion.

And she could not tell why her heart sunk as she entered the dark doorway, or why it so jarred on her troubled heart to hear Mildred bid her enter her home.

"This comes to me from my mother," Mildred laughed; "which is why it was not given to you, I suppose."

Goldie looked up into the dark eyes and said sadly:

"I do not wish the house in the city which was given me by your father. Take it, Mildred; I shall be glad to give it to you. Ah, if I could only take this load off my unhappy heart as easily!"

Mildred's eyes flashed fiercely.

"Are you so very unhappy, then, Goldie?"

Goldie smiled sadly.

"How could it be otherwise, Mildred? I do not envy you your happiness, but I know that my life is ruined. But let us not refer to this again. I shall not long weary you with my dejected face, for I have formed a plan which I shall soon put in execution."

"Remove your things, dear," said Mildred, eyeing her keenly. "What is your plan?"

"I shall leave this country. After a short time here, I shall return to the city, and endeavor to find distraction in travel. At least I may find opportunities to do good with the money that has been given me."

Mildred laughed bitterly when she was alone in her own apartments.

"Does she think I do not see through that ruse? She hopes to meet Donald in her travels. Aye, and she would meet him, for the moment he knew she was away from me, he would find the means of meeting her. No, no! you shall not meet him thus, Goldie."

She was sedulously kind to her unsuspecting guest during the remainder of the evening, and did all she could to make her forget the evil impression she had formed on arriving at Red Oak.

But she offered no objection when Goldie, early in the evening, suggested that she would like to retire for the night.

Indeed, she declared she was very tired and sleepy, herself, and rose at once to accompany Goldie to her apartments.

Goldie had already been to them, and had been depressed by their great size and gloom, but although they were in a lonely part of the mansion, she was not troubled by any fears.

"I have given you these rooms," Mildred said, "because they are by themselves and will permit you to feel more secluded than if you were nearer to me."

Goldie's maid had feared that she would be called on to remain with her mistress, and was relieved when told that she was to sleep in the same part of the house with the other servants.

"I'm glad of that," she muttered in a low tone.

"What did you say?" demanded Goldie kindly.

The girl hesitated a moment, and then said frankly:

"I said I was glad not to have to sleep in this part of the house, Mrs. Selden. I did not mean to trouble you about it, but indeed, I can't bear to come here, even now when the evening is only just falling, for the story is that this part of the house is haunted."

Goldie paled at the words, but made a gesture of impatience.

"Haunted! that is childish talk, Rose. There are no such things as ghosts, and no sensible person believes in them."

"It's all right if you don't," Rose replied, shaking her head doubtfully; "I only know that I would die of fright at the very thought of sleeping in that room."

Goldie had dismissed the girl at that moment, and had endeavored to dismiss the subject, too, from her thoughts, but although she did not fear such shadowy things as ghosts, she could not banish a vague uneasiness from her mind.

It came to her with redoubled force and pertinacity when Mildred accompanied her to her apartments.

"It is very lonely here," she said in a low tone. "How should I communicate with you if there was need?"

A strange smile flitted over Mildred's face as she replied:

"The only way is by the hall through which we have just come. Are you feeling at all ill that you ask the question?"

"Not at all."

She was tempted to speak of the story Rose had told her, but shame kept her silent, and she let Mildred go from the room with a false smile and word of farewell on her lips.

Rose timorously performed for Goldie such service as was necessary, and showed herself so anxious to get away, that Goldie could not forbear saying, reproachfully:

"If there really be danger here, Rose, do you care so little for me that you can hardly wait to leave me alone to it?"

"Oh!" cried Rose, with a shudder and a glance around her, "I do not wish to leave you; but I am afraid. It is the truth. I am afraid! Hark! what was that noise?"

She caught Goldie by her wrist and stared about her with a terror that was not feigned, and which, in spite of her resolution, affected her mistress.

"It—it was nothing," Goldie said faintly. "Do not be foolish, Rose. How is it possible that any harm can come from such a source as you suppose? I am sure there is no such thing as a ghost."

"Please, please do not speak the word!" gasped Rose. "And, oh, when I leave you, won't you hold the light at the door until I am out of the corridor?"

Goldie put a severe restraint on herself and let Rose hasten her preparations for the night without giving way to her own undefined terrors.

And when Rose was ready to go Goldie did not seek to detain her by a word, but held the light at the door until she was out of the corridor.

Then, however, as she closed and bolted the door, her own nervousness took possession of her, and she burst into tears and sobbed until relief came.

"What is it that troubles me?" she murmured to her-

self at last. "I do not fear such things as ghosts, which I know are only creatures of the imagination. Then why do I permit my feelings to overcome me in this way?"

She drew her wrapper about her more closely and paced the floor, while she tried to account to herself for the uneasiness which had so wrought upon her as to cause her to break down.

It did not occur to her that the fit of depression had begun from the moment when the great gray pile had come into sight from the carriage windows, though she recalled how she had shuddered from some unknown, inexplicable cause when she had entered the doorway of the house.

"I wonder," she murmured, "why it is that I feel so? There can be no good cause for it—none."

She sat down in front of the open fire, sleep banished from her eyelids by the excitement she had passed through.

"Perhaps," she thought, "it is only my low spirits, acted on by the terror of poor Rose, whose superstitious fancies have unsettled her brain for the while. I will lie down and think of it no more."

She passed into her bedroom, which she instinctively studied for a moment by the light of the lamp.

"How silent and gloomy!" she muttered. "I seem shut off from all the world in here."

She shuddered as she spoke, then gathered courage, turned down her light, and crept shivering into the bed.

All the household, tired without doubt with the fatigues of the day, had retired early. Even Mildred had dismissed her maid after being early disrobed for slumber.

But while the others retired to bed to sleep, Mildred alone only locked her door after her retiring maid, and then began with swift, eager fingers to don her clothes again.

She laughed fiercely as she did so, and her lips continued to mutter evil words against that one of the guests beneath her roof who was least deserving of harm, and most to be pitied for her sorrows.

"She fears something," she said, more coherently, as she pinned the collar at her throat, and threw a shawl over her shoulders as if contemplating a journey from her room. "Ere morning dawns she will have something to fear in grim reality."

She glided to the door as she spoke thus, and carefully unlocking it, listened with it open.

There was no sound from any part of the house, and she ventured stealthily forth, closing and locking the door after her.

"The meddlesome maid may return for something," she muttered. "Better for her to keep her room and sleep soundly this night."

She crept softly along the hall, listening for any sound as she went, and her steps led her past the door of Goldie's apartments.

No fear of visionary creatures seemed to daunt her fierce spirit as she threaded the gloomy and silent corridor, and when she reached the door of the apartments she stooped and listened at the keyhole.

Goldie slept in the room beyond, and her light breathing could not be heard from where Mildred stood.

"She may not sleep yet," she murmured, "but it matters little whether she does or not. Your doom is sealed, my dainty beauty. Ah! you would steal my love from me, and turn the happiness in my heart to gall!"

She crept stealthily on, but at a sudden thought turned and softly tried the knob of the door. When she discovered that it was locked an evil smile wreathed her lips, and she went on muttering:

"I hoped it would be so. But it could make little difference. I wonder what it was that troubled her so when she bade me good night?"

The corridor led her now into a part of the house that had lain in disuse for many years, and was seldom, if ever, trodden by any of the servants, who were all firm believers in the notion that it was haunted.

The passageway took a sharp turn about fifty feet

beyond the door of Goldie's apartments, and there ended in a ladder which stood up and projected into a trapdoor in the ceiling.

It was a singular place for the fastidious Mildred to be going at that hour, but she mounted the ladder with an assured step, and was presently in a dark loft.

There was a window at the far end, and to it she crept with cautious foot and outstretched hand, so that she would not fall or run into anything. At the window she stopped and rested for a moment, her face hard and cruel as it showed in the dim light.

"How silent it is!" she murmured. "Not a sound to betray the presence of a living thing."

She bent her head and held her breath while she listened. A fierce smile of triumph distorted her face, and with a firm but cautious step she crept along the side of the room, her hand feeling its way on the wall.

Presently she stopped again, and began to feel over the wall, as if in search of something, which in a moment an exclamation of pleasure betrayed the discovery of.

It was a slight lump on which her hand rested, and which had caused the cry of pleasure. She paused a moment, then pressed the lump with all her force, while she stood in an attitude of listening.

The sound of a faint tinkle fell on her ears, and she

straightened up and seemed to wait for some result. It came suddenly.

The wall opposite to where she stood opened as if by magic, and a bright light streamed forth from the opening.

"You are there, then?" she said, in a low tone.

"Yes; you did not suppose we would keep you waiting, did you?" was the query in a hoarse voice, in a tone of vulgar familiarity. "We are not the sort to keep beauty waiting."

Her lip curled, but her face showed no sign of fear, as she glided across the loft, and passed through the opening, by the side of which stood a heavily built ruffian of the coarsest type.

The opening, or door, whichever it was, closed after her, and she, without waiting to exchange any more words with the man, glided softly across the room and entered one which opened beyond.

The room in which she was now was small, but well-lighted and comfortably furnished, and on the table, which stood in the middle of it, there stood a bottle of liquor and some food.

That the bottle had been applied to more than once was evident by the soiled glasses, by the diminished contents, and by the flushed face of a man who sat by the side of the table, his hand on a tumbler in which there still remained a few drops of liquor.

"Ah!" he said familiarly, and without more than half rising from his seat to salute her; "so the ball is opened, eh? And does the dance begin at once?"

She bit her lip at his coarse, familiar form of address, and eyed him with a keen glance as if she would see how much under the influence of liquor he was.

He was quite as rascally looking as his companion who had admitted her, but was far better looking, and much better clothed.

There was something in his manner and language, too, that betokened that he might at one time have associated with gentlemen, though the time must have been almost forgotten.

His eyes dwelt on the beautiful creature who came into his presence thus unprotected, and there was every sign of admiration in his gaze. He laughed softly at her expression, and pushing the glass from him, said carelessly:

"Don't be alarmed, Miss Selden—Mrs. Irwin, I mean; we have not taken too much. You see, we can't do much without a few drops to liven us up. I saw our dainty little lady arrive. I hope she sleeps well."

He laughed as he spoke, and would have poured himself out another glass of liquor if Mildred had not snatched the bottle away.

"Not now, if you please, sir. When you have done

the work for which you have engaged yourself, you may drink to your heart's content."

He laughed softly as he pushed his glass from him, and said in a chuckling tone:

"You are a plucky sort. Why, you don't suppose you could keep me from it if I didn't wish to let you have your way, do you?"

"You will do as I wish, or do nothing," she retorted, with a rising flush. "I am no weak woman to be trifled with."

"Weak woman? No, by Heaven! you are not weak; but then we are two strong men, and you are only a woman, after all. You wouldn't dare to make a fuss, no matter what we did. But don't start back that way, we won't do any more than we agreed to. Only don't play the tragedy queen with us at this stage of the game."

She flashed a look at the other wretch, and saw that he was watching them with a coarse grin of admiration for his comrade on his face.

She realized that she was playing with fire in using such tools for her purpose, and with an effort subdued her anger.

"I don't ask anything out of reason," she said. "If you get intoxicated, you can't do the work you agreed to do."

"We don't propose to get drunk, Mrs. Irwin," the

fellow said; "but I suppose what annoys you most is my admiration of you. Bless you! you mustn't mind that. I always did admire female beauty, didn't I, Jake?"

"You bet you did, Harry," was the grinning response.

"Well," said Mildred, haughtily, "you need not waste any of your admiration on me. It would be just as well to save it for the lady who is to have the honor of having a claim to it."

"All right," laughed the fellow. "I admit she is beautiful enough."

"Are the letters written?" she asked.

"At your service, Mrs. Irwin."

As she spoke he drew two letters from his pocket and handed them to her.

She took them and looked them over with a smile of satisfaction.

"They look good enough to be genuine," she said in a complimentary way.

"Yes," he said, "I flatter myself I know how to do that sort of thing; in fact, you know, I have rather made a specialty of that branch of my business."

"But not very successfully," she said dryly.

"Not heretofore," he replied with an exaggerated bow; "but I hope that the present venture will prove more remunerative. Are we ready?"

"I do not believe it is worth while to wait any longer. I suppose your arrangements have been properly made?"

"Yes; I have a carriage and a pair of fleet horses waiting in charge of a trusty comrade."

"And the retreat?" she asked with a vindictive air.

"That is ready, too; and unless my calculations fail, our little bird will be sheltered there before morning dawns."

"Let us go, then," she said.

"Did you examine her door as you came by?" he demanded, his eyes lighting up under the excitement of action.

"Yes, it is locked; but that need not trouble you."

He and his companion laughed hoarsely.

"No, I guess we won't let that trouble us. I think Jake and I will know how to overcome that difficulty. Got the tools, Jake?"

"Right you are, Harry."

Mildred put up her hand authoritatively.

"You will have no need of your implements," she said. "Do you suppose I had no other object than to isolate her when I put her in those apartments yonder?"

The man addressed as Harry looked inquiringly at her.

"I wouldn't like to swear to anything about you,

madam," he said. "All I know is that you are cursed deep. What was your object then?"

"These rooms up here are well hidden, are they not?" she asked, her eyes flaming with a triumph she felt herself about to achieve.

"That they are. I could be comfortable here for a month if need were. I thought the first time I came to them that they would make a rare hiding place if ever I got on the wrong side of the law. It might happen, you know," he added with a short laugh, in which his companion joined.

"There is no need for you ever to get on the wrong side of the law," she said sharply.

He shrugged his shoulders, but made no response.

"Come!" she said: "I am going to take you to her room by a secret passage, which was used by my ancestors years ago."

CHAPTER XXX.

MILDRED UNMASKS.

The two hired ruffians, for they were nothing else, followed Mildred with unconcealed wonder as she led them to the corner of the room, and by the pressure on a disguised button, revealed a small entrance to some place beyond.

"It looks," said the man called Harry, "as if your ancestors had need of no little secrecy. I wonder what line of business they were in."

"Silence!" she said haughtily; "such comments are unnecessary. Follow me! this will lead us to a secret entrance into her apartments."

She disappeared through the opening as she spoke, and they followed her as closely as possible.

They found themselves on a narrow staircase, which ran down in so steep a descent that it was necessary to exercise no little caution in the utter darkness in order to avoid falling.

It was easy to see that it led them to the floor below—the same that poor Goldie's rooms were on.

At the foot of the staircase a narrow hall ran. Mildred led her strange companions along this for a few paces, and then stopped and fumbled with the wall until a door noiselessly slid aside.

They did not doubt that this led them into Goldie's apartments, and so the words of their conductress proved to them.

"Remain here," she whispered. "This is the room next the hall. I shall go in and have a few words with her before you need come in."

"Don't make it too long," the leader whispered with a chuckle. "I am eager to inform my beautiful bride of what a happy fate is in store for her."

"I shall not be very long; in any event do not enter until I bid you."

She glided into the other room, closing the door after her.

The leader turned to his companion and whispered:

"That girl could give points to Satan himself. I wonder what mischief she has in her brain now?"

"Didn't she tell you everything?" Jake asked in his gruff voice.

"I don't know how much she told me. All I know is that I would not like to be in her power when there was the look in her black eyes that was in them just now. Well, I don't suppose we need worry about what doesn't concern us."

Mildred, unconscious of the words uttered when she left her companions, crept softly into the room where Goldie slept, troubled by fitful dreams.

The light in the lamp had been turned low, so that

objects could be dimly discerned in the room. Mildred could see where Goldie lay on the bed at the other side of the room.

She stole over, with the look of a demon glittering in her coal-black eyes, and bent above the sleeping girl.

Her heart was full of hate, but, as she looked, she admitted that never in her life had she gazed upon such a picture of ravishing beauty.

One little hand lay under the round, white cheek, on which the long lashes lay in curved lines; the other hand was thrown up over the curly head, and betrayed the glowing whiteness of the rounded arm.

The red lips were parted slightly, and the softly issuing breath was shown rather by the gently heaving bosom, which rose and fell under the covering like the sea on a summer's day.

"Curse her fatal beauty!" came hissing from the lips of the watcher. "But for that I would now be a happy fiancée, waiting in blissful security for the coming of my wedding day."

She drew back as she spoke, and one hand tremblingly sought a fold in her gown, as if she had that there which would avenge her on the innocent sleeper. But, with a violent effort at self-command, she withdrew her hand and bent over Goldie again.

"I could drop that on those perfect lips which would prevent their ever parting in words again," she

muttered. "Would it be wiser than pursuing my present scheme? It would be surer and briefer; but it would not give me the same joy.

"Now I shall—— But I will awaken her and let her know her doom. Ah! she will stare at me out of those violet eyes of hers in an awful horror of doubt and fear.

"Let her stare! Let her scream and beg and pray! Nothing will avail her now. There is not a servant in the house would come to her aid did they hear her; and no one will hear."

She laid her hand on the girl's shoulder, and the frightened sleeper started up with a wild cry of terror.

Then Mildred drew back with flaming eyes and let Goldie stare at her in the horror of one aroused from a nightmare.

"Ah! ah!" gasped poor Goldie.

"Well, do you not know me?" Mildred demanded.

"Mildred!"

"Yes, Mildred. And do you wonder why I am here at this hour of the night, disturbing your slumbers?"

"I—I locked the door," stammered Goldie, half rising.

Mildred laughed in a way that froze the frightened girl's blood in her veins. She deemed she had to do with one gone mad.

"Locks and bolts are nothing to me here. This is my house, girl. This was a place that could not be taken from me by a doting old man. This is my house, and I know its ways. I did not come by the door."

Her hatred of the beautiful creature trembling before her was such that it made her incoherent. But Goldie gathered enough to understand that there was a secret entrance to her room.

"Why—why did you come here, Mildred?" she asked.

"Why did I come? Ha! ha! ha! I came because my bitter, undying hate made me wish to see you alone, where no one could come to interfere. Do you not tremble to see me? Does not your heart throb with a fear and horror too awful for description? Do you not quake with a terror which your worst fears cannot define? Answer me!"

Goldie now stared at her unexpected visitor with a new alarm. It began to dawn upon her that Mildred was not mad, but animated by a terrible hatred. It was this that shone in her baleful eyes, quivered in her hissing voice, and showed itself in the meaning of her furious words.

"Mildred," she cried, "tell me what you mean! Why have you come here at this hour to say such things to me? What is your purpose?"

Mildred laughed bitterly.

"Ah, you begin to understand at last. It comes to you that I have beguiled you to this lonely house, placed you in these distant apartments in order that I might at last visit on you the hate and fury which have gnawed within my heart since the first day I heard your cursed name mentioned."

"Go away! Leave me!" Goldie cried, her courage coming to her as she realized that what she had to deal with was no more than a furious woman. "I will not listen to you."

"But you shall listen to me. You shall hear all I have to say. You shall learn what fate I have doomed you to for coming between me and Donald Irwin, my love ere ever he saw you."

"I did not come between you. That is a false accusation. He never loved you, and he did love me from the first moment he met me, just as I loved him. Then I gave him up to you because of my oath, and because I would not have him do a dishonorable thing though my life's happiness were at stake."

"How dare you say these things to me?" screamed the furious girl. "But I will silence your tongue with terror. Do you think I do not know that you have hoped that something would happen to bring you and him together?"

"It is false. I hoped for no such thing. Nor can you frighten me with your threats. I am glad that at

"last I have found you out. Now I will leave your roof forever."

"Yes, you shall leave it; but how? It shall not be to go forth the rich and fascinating widow to whom the world will bow in homage and adoration; but as a creature so vile and hideous that the world will turn from you in disgust."

"I begin to think that my first fear was correct, and that you are in truth demented," said Goldie coldly.

"Demented! No, I am not demented, though it may well be that I am beside myself with just wrath. I am not insane, but it will be lucky for you if you can escape your torments by a madness which will kill memory and all consciousness."

Goldie attempted to rise from her bed; but as she did so Mildred thrust her back with a jesture of fury.

"You shall not rise until I am through with you, you base-born factory girl!"

Goldie saw that she could gain nothing in a struggle with her visitor; though the probabilities were that she was the stronger of the two.

"Say then what you will," she cried, scornfully; "but do not hope to frighten me with foul or venomous words."

Mildred laughed shrilly.

"So you are not to be frightened? Is it so? Listen then, and if I do not see that round cheek blanch with

a terror that will send the throbbing blood all to your heart, you may call-yourself brave.

"But ere I begin, let me prove to you that I do not use empty words when I tell you you are in my power."

She glided to the door as she spoke, and threw it open, crying fiercely as she did so:

"Enter, and let my victim know with whom she has to deal!"

As Goldie's staring eyes fixed themselves on the doorway, she almost fainted with terror to see the two ruffians step into it and look upon her with greedy eyes.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"I WILL DESTROY YOUR BEAUTY!"

A scream of shame, fear and horror burst from Goldie's lips, and she fell back on her pillow a prey to dire anguish.

Mildred laughed like the archfiend at the expression that filled the violet eyes, and turned to the men, saying:

"Go out again. She knows now with whom she has to deal."

The men went out and closed the door behind them. Mildred went nearer to Goldie again and addressed her in hard tones of unrelenting hate.

"You may dress yourself. Those men are to be your companions in a midnight journey. They will enter when I go out; so unless you wish them for maids you will dress quickly."

"Are you human?" panted Goldie, quivering with shame and terror.

"I am one whose life you have blasted by your baby beauty," was the fierce response; "but do not bandy words with me. Dress, and then prepare to listen to me."

Goldie was not long in dressing, and Mildred

watched her movements with a terrible smile distorting her face; for, as she dressed, poor Goldie was looking furtively about for some avenue of escape.

"There is no way out but by that door," Mildred sneered. "I took good care of that. Oh, I have been planning for this many days! Those two men are the most depraved and ruthless ruffians I could find in the city of New York. I hired them to come here and wait for us. Oh, they will make you a nice pair of companions!"

"What is your purpose?" demanded Goldie, summoning up her courage as well as she could.

"My purpose is to be avenged for the injury you have done me. Listen! I shall have those men spirit you away to a secret place they have prepared for you, and ere you regain your liberty you will be forced to wed one of them."

"Never!"

"Are you so sure? Do you not know that there is such a thing as dishonor in this world? Those men are not overnice, my little beauty. They will not sue for what they can demand. Take my advice and wed when you are asked; then you may be spared much misery. You see I am kind after all."

"You are worse than they, for you are a woman!" cried Goldie.

"I am a furious woman, and I am far—far worse

than they! Better look for mercy from them than from me!"

"I shall be sought by my friends!" Goldie cried.

"You mean that you will be sought by Donald. Ah! I knew what your instant thought would be. See how I have provided against that! This is a letter from you to him. I warrant you would not know yourself that you did not write it."

She held the letter so that Goldie could see but not touch it; and the poor girl saw that it was indeed so perfect a copy of her handwriting that no one could distinguish between it and her own.

"Now I will read it," Mildred said vindictively.

She spread out the sheet and read it aloud, Goldie standing like one paralyzed with horror as she listened:

"DEAREST DONALD: This will be the last time that I ever shall address you in this or any other way. I can bear my misery no longer. Mildred triumphs over her victory and makes life hateful to me. But I could bear that were it not that I know you never can be mine.

"I have come with Mildred to her country house, and might learn to forget my misery, if not you, were I permitted to be here alone. But I cannot endure to remain under the same roof with one who bears your name, and who constantly reminds me of you.

"I am going from here, and if I live, which my

soul tells me is not to be, I shall never appear again where anyone who has ever known me is likely to be.

"Pray Heaven to forgive me if I do the one thing that will bring me forgetfulness. My sorrow is greater than I can bear.

Yours in life and death,

"GOLDIE."

"It will kill him," Goldie moaned, her first thought being of him she loved.

"It is a cunning letter, is it not?" gloated Mildred. "Ah! I studied well over its terms ere I committed it to paper. It will fool him well."

"Oh, Mildred! are you human?" wailed Goldie.

"No, I am not human, as you will learn before I am through. This is but the beginning. Here is another letter addressed to me. It tells me that you have determined to leave me and my roof forever, and begs me not to follow you. Ha! ha! Of course I shall be heartbroken, and shall have the place searched. It will be a capital comedy."

Goldie shrank away, as if despairing of either escape or of softening the heart of her persecutor.

"Do you comprehend yet what your fate is to be? You are to wed one of those men. I believe they and a companion just as vile are to throw dice to decide to which of them you are to belong. Believe me, there is little to choose between them."

"They may kill me, but they shall not make me wed," whispered Goldie, in horror.

"It matters not to me whether you wed one of them or not. Dishonor will be your portion if you do not. But that I must leave to you. There is another thing: You are very beautiful. I admit it. You are exquisitely beautiful."

She smiled hideously as she spoke, her eyes roving over the bewitching form and face of the poor girl.

"Really, I do not wonder that Donald fell in love with you. I think any man would. See how infatuated my father was! Your beauty makes you dangerous to the peace of other women, Goldie. Did you ever think of that?"

"Oh, Heaven's mercy! what awful thought is in your brain now?" gasped Goldie, terrified by what she saw revealed in the glittering eyes of the other.

"What! does my face betray what is going on within? It is bad, Goldie, dear, to have a telltale face. Perhaps it will be otherwise with you in the future."

Her hand was stealing down into the folds of her gown, as she spoke in tones that were a horrible mockery of tenderness and love.

And she glided constantly nearer to Goldie, her lurid eyes fixed like coals of fire on the blanched face and cowering form.

But Goldie retreated as slowly as the other advanced, as if she feared some frightful development.

"Ah, my dear Goldie," murmured Mildred, with hideous mockery, "do not go from me. It is unkind and useless, too; for I shall surely come up to you unless you wish to fly to my friends on the other side of the door for protection."

Goldie shuddered with terror, and glanced involuntarily at the door, near which she stood then. And yet it seemed to her that she would almost rather trust to those wretches than to the woman who glided after her so stealthily, and with such an awful purpose gleaming in her baleful eyes.

And now Goldie began to notice the hand that sought something in the gown, and it seemed as if the movements of that hand fascinated her, for she could not help but watch it.

"You are wondering what I seek here, I think," murmured Mildred, her white teeth gleaming in a smile that was terrible in its fury. "Ah! you shall see presently, and after that you shall wish that you had never seen."

She drew a wide-mouthed bottle from her pocket as she spoke, and held it up before the eyes of the other.

"You look as if you did not even suspect, Goldie. Well, I will tell you. I swore, when your beauty

robbed me of my lover, that I would destroy that beauty so that it would rob no other girl. And that is what I am going to do now.

"Ah! do not think to escape me. You cannot do that. This is vitriol, and I shall dash it over your pink-and-white face. Then it will eat away the soft flesh, and will leave you scarred and hideous.

"Now do you understand? Now do you know what it is to cross the path of one who loves as I love? Take this on your fair face, and live a creature so ugly that men will shudder when they look on you!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

A N A W F U L M O M E N T .

Perhaps the most awful moment in the life of Goldie was when she looked into the passion-distorted face of Mildred and realized that there was nothing conceivable that she would not do to wreck her happiness.

She knew by the implacable hatred she saw there, by the almost insane jealousy that glowed in the midnight orbs, that the threat which the lips had uttered would be executed, if nothing interposed to prevent.

And what could interpose, in that lonely room? What was to hinder that poised bottle from spilling its burning contents on the fair face?

"Mildred, spare me this!" Goldie moaned, clasping her little hands together.

"Spare you!" hissed Mildred, holding her hand as if from the purely malignant pleasure of seeing her victim's agony. "I would not spare you, though you pleaded from your dying-bed. I have sworn to look upon your scarred and hideous face, so that I might gloat over it. Spare you! no, ten thousand times no!"

"May Heaven have mercy on you in your hour of need!" murmured Goldie, covering her face with her

hands, and resigning herself to her fate, because horror seemed to paralyze her limbs.

The horrid laugh of hate and fiendish joy that broke from the lips of Mildred made the blood run cold in the veins of her hearer.

"I ask for no mercy," she cried. "I have prayed for this hour to come, and now I shall be content with the future. I gloat in anticipation over the hour when Donald shall look upon your scarred face, when he shall know that you have become the bride of one of the vilest of the vile. Ah! this is a vengeance worthy of the cause.

"Spare you! pity you! why, every scream of agony that passes your lips will be music to my ears, and your wild writhings of pain will make my eyes rejoice. Did you not come between me and my love? But for the face whose beauty I shall destroy forever, would he not now be my faithful lover?

"And now prepare to feel the fiery vitriol eating its way to the very bone. Prepare for an agony of mind and body such as is known to but few. Realize on earth the torments of the damned!"

With a wild, gurgling cry of hate, as if her throat refused to longer serve her horrid purpose of vituperation, Mildred snatched the little hands from the beautiful face, and held the bottle over the doomed eyes, which gazed in silent horror upward.

"I think not, Mrs. Irwin."

The bottle was snatched deftly from her hand at the very moment that its contents were about to be poured down upon the helpless victim.

With a strangled cry of rage Mildred turned and faced the principal villain of the two she had engaged.

"Give me that bottle! Give it to me, I say! How dare you come between me and my vengeance! Beware of what you do!"

Her beautiful face was such no longer as it grew distorted with insane rage and fury.

Even the hardened ruffian recoiled from her. But he did not yield up the bottle to her working fingers.

Goldie, recovering the use of her limbs under the shock of a respite from her fate, sprang to the other side of the apartment and cowered against the wall.

Her great violet eyes remained fastened on the faces of the two enemies who quarreled over her, and her palpitating heart began to throb with the hope that between them she might yet escape the horrors Mildred had prepared for her.

"No," said Harry, sullenly, "you shall not have it."

"Do not dare to trifle with me!" she hissed, crouching like a tigress about to spring. "Give me the bottle!"

He drew back with a scowl of anger.

"Don't imagine you can play that game on me, my

lady," he said. "You are no Sunday-school miss, but I am no chicken myself. Let us have fair play."

"Fair play! Have I not paid you well?"

"I don't deny it."

"Was it not a part of the bargain that you should remain in there until I was ready for you?"

"Quite right."

"Oh, sir!" gasped Goldie in terror, "do not let her have it again. I have done her no wrong. I have done all I could to let her have the man she loves, and before Heaven I have no thought of coming between him and her."

"Don't fret yourself, my little beauty," was the gruff response; "I'm not going to let her have it. I guess not. What! let her destroy a face like that? Let her mar a pair of such lips? No, no, no! See! this is what I will do with the acid."

He turned swiftly as he spoke, and poured the contents of the bottle on the embers of the fire.

A fierce scream of rage broke from the lips of Mildred at his action, and it looked for a moment as if she would precipitate herself on him.

He looked at her and laughed wickedly, holding up the bottle, which still contained a small portion of the vitriol.

"Better not," he said. "It will burn you as well as

another. It is no respecter of persons. Keep off, my lady!"

A hoarse, incoherent cry was her only response, and she drew back with grinding teeth and clinched hands. He poured all that remained into the fireplace.

She watched him for a moment, and then a new thought seemed to take possession of her, and she turned with the swiftness of lightning and leaped toward Goldie, crying:

"I will tear her eyes out with these fingers. She shall not escape my vengeance."

The man uttered an oath and sprang after her, but his movements were too slow, and if it had depended on him, Goldie might have yet become a victim to the fury of Mildred.

But the young girl was on her guard now, and at the movement of her unrelenting foe, she glided from her place, and in a moment was where the man could protect her.

"Well done!" he exclaimed with a laugh. "But I swear it is a novelty when anybody turns to me for protection against any worse person. It never happened before. Keep it up, Mrs. Irwin. You may make her love me before you get through."

Goldie shrank in horror from him as he turned his leering face toward her. He laughed at the move-

ment, but interposed his person between Goldie and Mildred.

"Curse you both!" hissed the latter, beside herself with fury.

"Take care," laughed the man, who had now recovered all his insolent ease of manner. "Curses, they say, always come home to roost."

Mildred ground her little white teeth in the very impotence of rage.

"Come," he said, "why not be reasonable? You don't suppose I want my pretty bride made hideous, do you?"

"I will pay you well for it!" cried Mildred, turning on him with a sudden hope. "You have but to name your price and I will pay it. My vengeance will not be complete until I have destroyed the beauty which has been my curse from first to last. See how even you take her part!"

He laughed.

"I am not taking her part; I am taking my own part. It isn't often a fellow has the chance to win a bride so beautiful and so rich at once. Why, you can't pay me as much as she can. I don't need money when I have her bank account to draw on."

"What is her beauty to you. Give her to me for a little while!" coaxed Mildred.

Goldie waited with a terrible anxiety for the issue

of a dialogue which, at the best, was most horrible to her.

It seemed to her as if the whole scene was too awful to be true. She almost expected to open her eyes presently and discover that all had been but a nightmare.

"What is her beauty to me!" he repeated. "What is beauty to anyone? Who can answer that question? And yet beauty has been the thing most valued in all the history of the world."

It was plain to Mildred that she must seem to acquiesce now in order that her opportunity might come later; for the purpose that was in her heart would never yield to anything but success.

"All of which means that you, too, have fallen in love with the milk and roses of her cheeks," she sneered.

"That is what it means," he replied, with a mocking bow.

"And suppose your companions feel as you do?" she asked, gazing now at the face of the other ruffian with hope in her heart.

The leader smiled derisively.

"Do you fancy you can make strife between Jake and me? Jake, my good lady, does not have the same keen appreciation of beauty that I do. He worships

money. Oh, we shall make a fair division of the spoils. What do you say, Jake?"

That ruffian grinned. He seemed to think everything his companion said exquisitely funny.

"I say that if I had my choice, old man, I'd take the missis herself."

The leader broke into a hoarse guffaw.

"Well said, Jake. There, Mrs. Irwin! you can never say Jake is not a man of gallantry."

Mildred bit her lip in her fury.

"Let us have done with this foolery! Take her away!"

She turned fiercely on the cowering and helpless Goldie.

"I have been balked of the sweetest morsel of my revenge; but enough remains. You go with these two scoundrels, who only have a sort of pity, now, in order that you may be reserved for a fate which I know gives you greater anguish than the thought of mutilation.

"Take her, wretches! I need not make you promise that you will perform the remainder of your task faithfully, for it is such as self-interest urges you to do.

"Take her away! But do not fancy, Goldie Selden, that you have escaped my full hate because you go scathless, now. Until I die I will pursue you. I shall never rest until I have robbed you of your beauty."

"Don't fret yourself about her, my dear," said the wretch, with a leer of admiration at the lovely face. "I intend to take good care of you. I always was an admirer of beauty; and the blonde sort is my choice.

"So come along, and we will find a more comfortable place for you than this is. Now, don't hang back, my dear. I have a trifle of chloroform in my pocket which I shall feel obliged to give you if you do not come peaceably and quietly.

"Good night, Mrs. Irwin! Any time I have anything in your line let me know, for I shall be in your debt for this beautiful bride."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A FUTILE STRUGGLE.

It seemed impossible that such things could happen in a civilized land; but the fact stared poor Goldie in the face.

If hope had pointed out one loophole of escape, she would have had the courage to struggle. But there seemed nothing to do but submit.

It was horrible beyond measure to think of going with wretches who avowed such purposes as they did, but the terror which the fury of Mildred had inspired within her actually made her feel safer with even the pair of ruffians.

Moreover, it was plain that she would have pleaded in vain to be permitted to remain in the power of Mildred. There was no choice whatever, unless she preferred to be carried away under the influence of a drug, which would leave her helpless.

Horrible as the choice was, it was better to accept the alternative and go quietly with the men.

"I will put my faith in Heaven," she said to the man. "I have done no harm, and I know Heaven will protect me."

"Put your faith where you will," he sneered; "but

don't be foolish enough to make a fuss, for as surely as you do, Jake, there, will pick you up in his arms and smother you while I stupefy you. Behave yourself and no harm shall come to you."

Mildred had regained control of herself, and was waiting for the party to disappear, in order that she might conclude the work of giving the room a semblance of having been left voluntarily.

A sneer curled her lip as she looked at the uplifted eyes and prayerful face of Goldie, and she said mockingly:

"If Heaven should interfere to save you from your destined husband, please let me know."

The men laughed at the blasphemy, which was so much in keeping with their own modes of thought, and the leader said to Goldie:

"Don't mind her, my dear. Put on your wraps, and gather together anything you wish to take with you. You might as well be comfortable. The journey will be long and cold."

Goldie thought at first to refuse to do a thing that would indicate a willing departure; but a second thought determined her to act otherwise.

She donned her hat and coat, and collected a number of things, which she put in a small hand satchel.

"Tjmph!" grunted the man called Jake in the ear

of the other, "she takes it kinder than I thought she would. Stuck on your beauty, I guess."

The fellow laughed hoarsely, and answered in a whisper:

"She has sense enough to know that when there's no choice it's no use to make a row. It looks to me as if she would be reasonable to the end. If we play our cards right, old man, you and I and Bill ought to live on the fat of the land."

"Leave you alone for that, Harry. I'll stick by you, and so will Bill. You can take the gal, and all we ask is our share of the boodle."

"And you'll get it, Jake. Why, she's worth a cool million. Over three hundred thousand apiece."

Goldie stood ready with her satchel in her hand, and the leading ruffian stepped forward to take it from her.

"Let me keep it," she said, pleadingly.

He laughed hoarsely.

"Upon my word, I do believe you think you can escape. You can't do that, my beauty. Keep your satchel, since you wish to, and learn that our arrangements are too well made."

He led the way out of the room as he spoke, motioning her to follow him.

Jake came behind her, and a glance told her that he was ready to grasp her in his arms at the first suspicious movement.

Mildred followed them with her eyes until they were out of the room. Her teeth were set as if she were exerting her utmost powers of self-control to keep from breaking forth in fury.

"Why did I not anticipate this result?" she muttered. "I might have known that her beauty would bewitch the fellow. What is there in her that seems to drive men mad?"

"If I had but suspected I could have arranged to let them all die on their way out. I would rather see her dead than going away so. How can I tell that she will not escape?"

"I might kill her, now. Shall I do it? No, it would not be wise. I might be discovered through those wretches; and then my plot would come to a sad ending indeed.

"No, I can wait." She cannot escape me. They will not let her go. It is to their interest to keep her until she is bound to one of them by ties of marriage.

"It is the leader who will wed her, and that means dishonor. Ah! he does not suspect that I know that he has a wife living. Dishonor to her! Disgrace and despair!"

She laughed discordantly as she spoke, and began to put the room into such order as it would be likely to have if Goldie had really stolen away from it.

She tossed some of the contents of the trunk on the

floor, laid aside a few things to be hidden—things which it was likely Goldie would have taken had she gone over her trunk more deliberately—and finally placed the letters which had been forged on the dressing table.

She then unlocked the door leading into the hall, saw that the secret door was properly closed and fastened, and then stole out and downstairs to unlock the hall door.

There remained nothing now but to go upstairs to where the ruffians had made their abiding place, and see that they had left everything in order.

She did all this, and then returned to her own room with her face hard and set, as if there was no remorse in her breast for the poor girl who had, through her instrumentality, been handed over to the merciless keeping of a band of scoundrels.

Goldie, meanwhile, had been hurried silently but swiftly through the secret passage to the garret, and from there down by the back staircase to a door which was little used, and to which the men with her had a key.

A dozen times she had made up her mind to utter a scream that should arouse some inmate of the house, but each time it seemed as if one or the other of her captors divined her purpose and whispered grimly in her ear:

"Do not forget that the least sign of resistance ends in the use of the drug. It is for you to choose."

So she found herself at last outside of the house, hurrying between the two men toward where the lawn ended in some straggling trees.

One held her by one arm, the other by the other, so that resistance or flight was out of the question.

"Oh, where are you taking me to?" she wailed.

"You will learn that in good time, my little beauty. Rest assured that no harm will come to you unless you bring it on yourself by your own conduct."

"What can you gain by treating me so?" she pleaded. "Is it my money you wish? I will swear to you by the most solemn oath that if you will free me, I will make over to you every cent I possess. I am used to poverty and am not afraid of it. You shall have every cent; and, oh, it will be honestly yours. No one shall have the right to say a word against your possession of it. Won't that tempt you?"

"I say, Harry," growled Jake, "ain't that worth thinking of?"

"No, you fool!"

"Well, it's just as you say, Harry. You'd ought to know. It seems to me, though, that she offers everything we could get anyhow, and no risk."

"There won't be any risk anyhow," was the gruff response.

“But why should you resort to force when I am willing to give it all freely?” pleaded Goldie eagerly. “What more can you ask for?”

“Why, to tell you the truth, my beauty,” answered the fellow, taking a firmer hold of the round arm, “I am just fool enough to care more for you than for your money. I want you.”

“But I will never wed you,” she cried passionately. “I would die first.”

“If it were a question of death or marriage I might take up your offer,” he answered coolly; “but it isn’t.”

“I will never wed you!” she panted; and then uttered a gasping cry, and tried to wrench herself free from the hands that held her.

“A little tiger cat, after all!” laughed the leader harshly. “The chloroform, Jake.”

“Oh, no, no, no!” she screamed, fighting in sheer desperation.

But the strong arms of the leader were clasped about her, and in a few seconds she was being at once stifled and drugged within the folds of a great cloak, which had been thrown over her head.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

GOLDIE'S PERIL.

When Goldie recovered consciousness, she was aware in a dim, confused way that she was in a carriage drawn by a pair of swift horses, which were being urged to speedy flight by the driver.

She started up, with the thought of making some wild attempt at escape, but instantly became aware of the futility of such a proceeding.

"Awake, eh?" said the voice of the man called Harry. "Well, don't get excited; we are almost at our journey's end. Oh! you couldn't escape if I wasn't here. The doors are securely closed. Quiet, now, my dear, unless you wish to feel the restraint of my arms."

She shrank away with a gasping cry of horror as she felt his arms about to encircle her. He laughed.

"Not very flattering, but I suppose it can't be helped. However, if you are wise you will try to accustom yourself to the notion of marrying me. That is a settled thing."

She did not answer; she knew instinctively that it would be useless to enter into any controversy with him. So there was silence between them, for he was kind enough to permit her to be undisturbed by his voice.

Perhaps half an hour elapsed before the carriage stopped.

She could hear a man leap from the box and come to the door of the vehicle.

"Here we are!" exclaimed her companion.

The door was pulled open, and ere she could utter a word of remonstrance she was caught in his arms and carried up a short flight of steps.

She screamed wildly, realizing that, if ever, she must escape now.

But the jeering laughter of the men told her that they did not fear her screams, and her heart sank with terror and despair.

The place of her imprisonment must indeed be secure from discovery if it was so isolated that there was no fear of her screams being heard.

It took Jake but a moment to open the door, and a second later she was carried inside and deposited on a chair in a room opening out of the hall. •

"Welcome home, my dear!" laughed the man who had held her. "Jake, get that lamp lighted and go see to the furnace. It hasn't been attended to for twenty-four hours."

The lamp was lighted, and the frightened girl found herself in a large, old-fashioned parlor, furnished richly but in antiquated style.

The man Jake left the room to do as he had been

bidden, and she was left alone with the one she feared most. He smiled grimly at her expression, and said:

"Don't you like your quarters?"

"Is there nothing I can say that will persuade you to release me?" she asked piteously.

"Nothing. The truth is that I have succumbed to your fascinations, my dear, and no offer of money could influence me to give you up."

"Heaven will not permit it," she cried, gaining courage from her very wretchedness. "And I will never submit."

She cast her eyes swiftly about the chamber as she spoke, and he smiled ironically.

"Oh, you might escape from here," he said; "but this is not your apartment. You shall be taken there presently. It has been prepared for an unwilling visitor. Come, my dear! I know you must be tired and half sick now, so do not try to argue a settled matter with me. To-morrow I shall do myself the honor of making myself more presentable, and will then wait upon you to let you know when the ceremony is to take place."

"Yes," she replied, "I am weary, body and soul, but I tell you now as I shall tell you to-morrow that I will not wed you. I know that Heaven will forgive me any act which shall help me to escape from your fiendish proposition."

"You mean suicide," he said calmly. "Well, the truth is, my dear, that I had thought of that, too, and have removed everything from your room with which you could by any possibility harm yourself."

Goldie choked back something which seemed to rise in her throat. The fellow, with terrible keenness, studied her face, and laughed softly.

"There is something I had not thought of before. You have in your possession something with which you hope to accomplish your desperate purpose. Well, I shall see to that, too. I will take that satchel, if you please."

His hand was on the satchel before she could prevent, and there was a mocking smile on his lips as he said:

"Your face is too telltale, my dear. But do not worry about that. I like you just as you are. And you will like me when you see me dressed suitably. Why, I have been called Handsome Harry in my time; and if I could only leave liquor alone for a while I am not sure I would not be called so again. Oh! we will make a nice pair."

"You cannot coerce me to wed you," she said defiantly.

He laughed grimly.

"What an unsophisticated little beauty you are!

But it only makes me love you the better. If you were a proud, knowing creature like Mrs. Irwin, now, you might stand some chance of being set free. In fact I don't think I could be hired to marry her.

"So your only idea of the way to bring about a marriage is force. Bless your innocent heart! No minister would marry us if you were not willing. It will be necessary for you to be a willing bride."

"That I will never be."

"How little you know yourself, or guess at the resources of a mind like mine that has been trained in many different schools. There are several ways of bringing you around to willingness."

She shuddered at his expression, and he laughed wickedly.

"There!" he exclaimed with a pretense of soothing her fears, "don't be unnecessarily alarmed. Would you like to know how I purpose bringing that about?"

"Well, you need only wait until to-morrow—to-day I should say, however, for day dawn is not far away. In the meantime——" he stopped and listened.

The footsteps of the returning Jake were heard. A strange, significant smile passed over the face of the leading ruffian.

Goldie noted it with a sinking of the heart. The words he had used to her, and his assured manner, made her feel that the chain of circumstance had been

so forged about her that in spite of herself she would be forced to wed this horrible man.

"In the meantime," he went on grimly, "we will induce you to slumber quietly, so that you will be ready for the ceremony, which will take place by daylight."

She leaped to her feet and stared at him with frightened gaze.

"What is it you are going to do?" she cried.

"I am going to put you to sleep, my dear. That is all."

"I will not take any drug!" she panted, a terrible fear oppressing her that if she went to sleep then she would surely wake the bride of this wretch.

There was something in his manner which led her to feel that once drugged she would be a pliant victim in his hands.

She had read that there were drugs that chained the will, but left the victim apparently conscious and complaisant.

"I think you cannot help yourself," he said with a low, hideous chuckle. "If I hold you and Jake gives you a dose of chloroform, what then?"

"There is a more terrible purpose hidden under your words!" she screamed in terror.

"It is true," he answered. "When you are stupefied ever so little by the chloroform, you will swallow whatever I give you. I shall give you a drug which will

make you obey me in the least detail. You will go before a clergyman with me and will answer as I wish.

"That, my dear, is what is going to happen to you. Jake, the chloroform!"

As he spoke he caught Goldie by the arms and held them securely.

Jake produced a bottle and a small sponge from his coat pocket.

CHAPTER XXXV.

DONALD IRWIN'S QUEST.

When Donald Irwin burst from the sight of Mildred after the ceremony of marriage, it could hardly be said that he was fully conscious of what he was doing.

He knew that he must, for his own sake and for hers, fly from her presence, for to remain with her was likely to induce a sort of madness, in which he might do what he would forever regret.

His loathing for her was as much instinctive as reasoned out, though he had grounds enough for repugnance in her determination to make him wed her after he had plainly told her he did not and could not love her.

At any rate, his one thought during the whole ceremony was to keep his promise, and then to turn from her forever. And as he sped down the street, his one wish was to get far away from the place where he had so suffered, and where his suffering love still must remain.

Ah! if he had only guessed how his conduct would add fuel to the fire of Mildred's hatred, he would never have left Goldie unprotected.

But it was impossible for him, or for anyone, to

divine the dark depths of Mildred's mind, so Goldie was left alone to bear the brunt of the storm of hatred and revenge.

He went to the railway station and bought a ticket for his far Southern home, thinking that there, if anywhere, he would find some peace of mind.

It was a vain hope, as he discovered immediately after reaching there, for his hunger was to be once again in the neighborhood of his love.

"Fool that I was!" he murmured; "why did I not remain where now and again my eyes could be cheered by the sight of her golden curls?"

Then he determined to return North as soon as he had attended to some matters which claimed his attention. He worked at these for two days, then came a letter in handwriting which he knew, though he had seen it but a few times.

"From her," he murmured, his heart throbbing wildly.

He could not hope that it contained any word of peace or joy for him, and yet the mere thought of her, the sight of her dear handwriting, made his heart leap.

He tore open the letter with trembling fingers and read it through to the end. It was the false note forged at command of Mildred.

His breath came and went swiftly as he read, and

his heart throbbed. But he could not comprehend why it had been written to him.

Something whispered to him that it was not such a letter as his darling would write, and yet such was the cunning of its concoction that he could not help seeing that all that was said was the probable truth.

"If it were from any other but that pure heart," he murmured, "I would think it meant that she wished me to hunt her out. But not she, not she."

But let him think what he would of it, it had sown the spirit of unrest in him so deeply that he could not do aught else but weigh its words over and over again.

"Let its meaning be what it will," he cried, at last, "I am going North to seek her. If she is alone she must be cared for, and if she will not permit me that happiness, as well I know she will not, then I will find some trusty person who will be my proxy."

So that night he turned his back on his Southern home, and traveled by express to New York.

He found no letters for him at club or bank, and he did not know what to do. He went to the house where he had left Goldie, and when he found it closed, remembered that the letter must have been written from the country.

That reminded him that it was to the house of Mildred that Goldie had gone, and for the first time a thrill of undefined dread shot through him.

Swift as thought he turned from the house and hastened to the station, from which he could take the train for Red Oak.

The thought that was in his brain was undefined, intangible, and yet it filled his soul with a strange foreboding.

He did not know Mildred as she was, but he could understand that she had turned out to be far other than he had dreamed any woman could be.

Why he should have this new dread of her connection with Goldie he could not have told, but so it was, and his fear increased as he drew nearer the country house.

Mildred, meanwhile, was expecting a visit from him. It was to bring him there, partially, that she had had the letter forged. And strange as it may seem there was a spark of hope in her heart.

Perhaps she hated him as she believed she did. Certainly she would do him a terrible injury if he persisted in his refusal to take her as his wife, yet it was true that she trembled with expectation and hope as the hour approached when he might be expected.

She had slept after witnessing the abduction of Goldie, and did not awake in the morning until she was roused by the noise of the discovery by one of the maids that the hall door was open.

The immediate thought in the house was that bur-

glars had visited there during the night, and the consternation was great. Regardless of the awe in which she was held by the servants, word was taken to Mildred at once, and she was actress enough to feign a fright and anger suitable to the circumstance.

"See what is stolen first!" she cried angrily, "and then send for a detective. No, I will do that. Find out my loss first."

With the assistance of her maid she hurriedly dressed and was on the scene in time to learn that so far as was discernible there was nothing missing.

Then, while she was seemingly trying to puzzle that out, Goldie's maid came running to her with white face and faltering voice, saying:

"Oh, Mrs. Irwin! Mrs. Selden is not in her room, and these two letters were on her table."

Mildred stared and snatched the letters from the girl's hand. The one that was addressed to her she tore open and in her agitation read aloud.

It was all very well acted, and not one of the servants doubted as they listened that it was real emotion that she showed when she learned that her father's widow had suddenly gone away.

"Dear Mildred," the letter read, "try to forgive me for leaving you in this strange way, but the truth is that I cannot remain under the same roof with you.

"I hope you will understand. I am sorry if you do

not, but this is the only explanation I can make you. You need not search for me, as I shall go where no one can find me.

GOLDIE SELDEN."

Everybody thought it was a strange epistle to come from gentle Goldie, but there were enough of those among the servants to shake their heads and say that it was not so very surprising after all.

Donald felt odd, indeed, as he stepped from the carriage and paid the man who had brought him. He was at the door of his wife's house, and yet was a stranger there.

As he turned from paying the man, the door was opened, and he was admitted with an air that told him he had been expected.

He stood awkwardly hesitating for whom to ask, when the servant helped him out of his dilemma by saying:

"Mrs. Irwin is in the sitting room, sir. Shall I tell her, or will you go there at once yourself?"

"I will go there," he answered. "Show me the way."

The man led him to the sitting room, in which a bright fire was burning, and which would have been a picture of cozy comfort but for the fact that nothing seemed right to him at that moment.

Mildred had artfully arranged the room to present a home-like appearance, thinking that if he was to be

won at all, it would be by such an air as that. No doubt the eyes of Donald saw that the room was cheerful, and that the woman who rose with quiet dignity to greet him was beautiful.

But the one painful and apparent fact was that Goldie was not there. It was she who was in his thoughts, not his wife. But Mildred stood up with a manner at once so dignified and so pleading that if his mind had not been full of Goldie he might have been softened.

"You are welcome to this hearth, Donald," she said, her well-modulated voice conveying suggestions that went far beyond the words uttered.

He did not answer her, but took a few steps into the room and stood still, gazing with a painful curiosity into her black eyes.

"I received a letter from Goldie," he said.

She had known that he came there in response to Goldie's letter, and she had schooled herself to expect just such a reference to her she hated; and yet, when it came in that fashion, it almost drove her beyond her self-restraint.

But she checked herself in time, and, in a choking voice, said:

"I sent you a letter left behind by her when she left me. But had you no other thought in coming here, Donald?"

She could have bitten her tongue out for uttering the words the next moment; but they were said, and could not be recalled.

Donald did not wish to anger her then; but he would not retreat a step from the position he had taken, so he replied in a low tone:

"Mildred, I would never have come here but for this letter. There can be nothing between us, for I do not love you. Let us not open that wound again, please."

She bit her lip until she could command her tongue; then said slowly and with an effort:

"We will talk of her you do love—Goldie."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

GOLDIE'S ESCAPE.

The human heart is strange in its manifestations, and acts according to no fixed rule; though it may always be consistent with itself.

Goldie had looked into the vengeful eyes of Mildred, had anticipated the burning flood of vitriol, and had been paralyzed with terror, unable to move a limb to save herself.

Now she was in the clutches of two strong and wicked men, who would stop at no crime, and because her honor, which was dearer than life or beauty, was in danger, she did that at which she never ceased to wonder.

Her arms were pinioned by the sinewy hands of the man who had made her his captive. She knew that the other ruffian was swiftly preparing to stupefy her with the chloroform which was contained in the bottle in his hand.

Her limbs trembled under her and her life seemed leaving her; but as it fixed itself in her mind that the end would be a marriage with this awful wretch, her brain began to work.

In the twinkling of an eye she comprehended every-

thing, weighed everything, and had reached a determination to free herself if possible.

She had never taken part in private theatricals, had never imitated any emotion or passion in her life; but at that moment it came to her to play a part, and she did.

Jake had taken the sponge in one hand and was ready to pour chloroform on it. His accomplice was urging him to haste, saying:

"Don't take all day, Jake. Hurry up!"

Goldie gave vent to a wild cry, and let her limbs sink under her, at the same time murmuring in broken accents:

"Heaven have mercy! Ah, what is the matter? I—I am dying! Help! Hel——"

She became limp and inert, and her limbs failed to support her longer.

"She's fainted, Jake!" cried Harry.

"What'll I do, then?"

"Never mind the chloroform now. Get the other stuff. It is in my room upstairs. Hurry up! Put the chloroform there, so that I can use it if necessary."

He carried Goldie to a lounge as he spoke and placed her on it. Jake ran from the room, and his companion in crime crossed the room to pick up the bottle of chloroform.

It was the moment Goldie had striven to gain for

herself. Her eyes were closed, but she had followed every movement by the sense of hearing as she so cunningly simulated a swoon.

She knew that it was one chance in a hundred that she could escape; but at least there *was* one chance, and she would take it.

The ruffian's back was toward her, and he in the act of stooping to take up the chloroform, when, with the movement of a startled fawn, Goldie leaped from the lounge and glided to the door.

She had not reached it ere he had turned, and, with an oath, was in pursuit.

"Fool!" he cried; "do you think to get away so easily?"

She made him no response at all. Her brain was whirling with the possibilities of her case, and it seemed to her that her brain had never before been so active.

If she could but reach the door in time to close and fasten it in his face! If she could then but reach the hall door!

She could not stop to consider how she would escape in the darkness of an unknown neighborhood from three active men, for she knew there was yet another of the scoundrels who had remained with the horses.

Perhaps he had gone to the stable with them, and might even now be outside ready to intercept her.

She thought of these things. Or more correctly they flashed through her mind without being taken into immediate account, but her brain was really busy with the present problem.

She had several feet the start of the wretch, but the door opened into the room. If there was no key in the lock, he could wrench the door out of her hand ere it was fairly closed.

Then she could not reach the hall door in time. If she did, might there not be a bolt on it that she could not find at once?

Would it be better to fly through the room door and make for the hall door at once? Her decision was reached ere her hand was on the door. It was reached while the imprecation of the man still rang in her ear.

Her eye had caught the glister of the key in the lock, and the door had swung to with a bang almost in the very face of the wretch.

But with an oath his hand was on the knob with her own, and she felt it pulled with a savage force that at another time she could not have withstood.

At that moment, however, she was battling for her honor, and with panting breath she threw all her weight on the pull she gave the door, and slight as it was it effected its purpose.

The door was snatched from his hastily taken grasp

and closed. Then with a gasp of fear lest she should fail, Goldie caught the key and gave it a twist.

The bolt shot into its place, the door was locked.

Goldie's heart leaped to her throat, and she crossed the now dark hall to where she knew the door was. Like lightning her hand flew over it and found the big key.

It was easy to turn that. But would the door then open? She tried it, and it seemed as if the joy of that gust of fresh air that swept over her face would make her swoon.

The door was open and she was free. Free for the moment, anyhow.

Ah! a new thought! She would lock that door, too. The key was removed from the lock, reinserted and turned. It was taken out and thrown far away. That was done instinctively.

Was freedom hers yet? Ah! she well knew that it was not. She was ignorant even of where she was.

She did not stop to study that out, however; but with the speed of a deer sprang down the steps and fled into the gray light of morning.

She saw woods in one direction, and as they afforded the nearest shelter from observation, she sped toward them. As she reached them she heard a crash of glass and then the voice of one of the men, cursing her and bidding her stop.

She did not even look around to ascertain who it was. What did that matter now? The only thing was to escape from them all.

But now she realized that her good fortune was in danger of failing her, for in the woods, of whose bounds she was ignorant, she was likely to be overtaken.

Her brain by this time, however, seemed to have accustomed itself to swift action, and as she strained it for a suggestion, it came.

Why not hide behind one of the thickets of underbrush near the edge of the woods? What so likely as that her pursuer would dive into them, in the natural belief that that was what she had done?

It required all her courage to refrain from fleeing, and to actually let the man overtake her.

But she did it. She crouched low and silently behind some witch-hazel bushes, and hardly breathed as she waited.

From where she was she could not see him approach, but when she heard the swift beat of his feet on the sod hardened by frost, and realized how swiftly he was running, she thanked Heaven that she had not made the vain attempt to run away from him.

He had ceased to cry out now, and was devoting all his energies to outstripping her in the race. He entered

the woods at the same point that she had, and, as she had hoped, continued his way through.

She listened to the crashing of his body through the dried twigs, and then with beating heart, crept to the edge of the woods and looked toward the house.

As yet the other men had not emerged from the house, which was still indistinct in the early morning light.

Like a ghost she glided out upon the lawn and sped across it to where the further line of trees showed like a gray bank.

At every step she expected to hear the shout of the man, as he returned from his fruitless pursuit after her, or the voice of one of the other two from the direction of the house.

But Heaven was with her in her brave struggle, and she reached the woods in safety and unseen.

She no longer thought how to hide, but only how to get as far as possible from the terrible men whose companionship was worse than death to her. So she tore her way through the tangled wood, which seemed of interminable extent, and never stopped for fatigue or the fear of tearing her tender flesh.

She remembered the danger of one lost in the woods going on in a circle, and endeavored to keep a certain star in front of her all the time. The woods was so dense that it was not easy to do that, however, and

she was afraid more than once that she had lost her particular star.

In the end, however, she reached a rough road, and though she knew there would be some risk of being overtaken there by her pursuer, she followed it until she was ready to drop from exhaustion.

Then she turned into the woods again to take the rest that was forced upon her by her inability to drag one foot after the other.

She did not permit herself a long rest, however, but started on again in a few minutes, refreshed by even so short a respite from exertion.

And thus she went on until she reached a more frequently traveled road, as she knew by its being smoother and less rutted.

She could not have told how long she kept on this way, but the sun was shining brightly when at last she espied a cottage standing back a little from the road.

She might not have had the courage to approach it if she had not seen a young woman with a baby in her arms come to the door to look about.

That decided her, and she entered the gate and staggered on to the threshold, where she sunk exhausted in a swoon.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

DONALD IN DANGER.

"Yes," Donald said, in answer to the words of Mildred, "we will talk of Goldie."

He ignored the reproach or the sneer, whichever it might be, that was implied in Mildred's words.

"What shall we say of her?" she asked. "Shall we say how beautiful she is, and how much you love her, though she is not your wife?"

"We will not talk of that, for it is not necessary," he answered. "You knew, when you forced the hateful marriage on me, that I loved her, and not you. I came to discover, if I could, why she left here."

"Did not her letter to you say?"

"Only vaguely."

"Her letter to me was vague, too. It seemed to mean that she hated me too much to remain under my roof. I suppose, like you, she did not like the marriage."

He looked keenly at her, and she returned his glance coldly; he could learn nothing from her face.

"Can you tell me where she has gone?" he asked.

"I know no more than you; not as much, it may be."

"Was there no clue to where she had gone?" he asked.

"We found none. It may be that no one here was as anxious as you to know, or it would have been different."

Her tone was harsh and bitter; it seemed as if she were trying to make him angry. She did not succeed in that, but there was an indefinable something in her manner that caused the lingering suspicion of her to come to life again.

"Mildred," he said, "something tells me that you are not as ignorant as you pretend."

"It is a pity," she sneered, "that the same something does not tell you in what I am not ignorant."

"Will you let me go to her room to see what there is there to help me trace her?" he asked abruptly.

"You may go," she answered, and rang the bell for a servant.

When the maid came she bade her lead Donald to the rooms that had been occupied by Goldie.

"He fancies he can discover some trace of Mrs. Selden," she said coldly.

"It may be that I cannot, Mildred," he said earnestly, "but I assure you that I shall find her somehow. I am rich enough to hire every detective in New York if need be, and I will do it if I cannot find her."

"It is a pity," she answered with curt fierceness, "that you ever let her go out of your sight."

"Would to Heaven I never had!" he murmured, as he left the room to follow the servant.

On the way upstairs he endeavored to learn something from the maid, but with all the willingness in the world, she could tell him nothing that bore on Goldie's sudden disappearance.

"This is very far from the other occupied rooms of the house," was the first thing he said when the apartments were reached.

"That is what everybody thought," was the answer. It is called the haunted wing, and Mrs. Selden's maid would not sleep here with her mistress."

Donald entered the rooms and looked around them.

"They have been cleaned since Mrs. Selden left them," he said quickly.

"Oh, yes, sir; they were cleaned up the next day. It was not a nice task for the woman either, though she never said a word to your wife, sir."

He stared at her.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Oh! the rooms were clean enough already, but there was some acid stuff in the fireplace where the fire had been that burned the poor woman's fingers terribly. I suppose it must have been something Mrs. Selden had thrown away."

"You do not know what it was?" he demanded quickly.

"One of the men said it was—oh! what did he call it? Yes, I remember—vitriol."

Donald caught his breath. He had no idea of the meaning of the information he had received, but it troubled him.

"Nothing was said about it to Mrs. Irwin?" he queried.

"Nothing."

It was useless to remain in the apartments, which had been so sedulously cleaned by order of Mildred, and Donald left them, with vague suspicions in his brain.

Mildred was seated in front of the fire as before, pretending to read a book. She let it fall negligently when Donald returned.

"Have you obtained a clue?" she asked ironically.

He never knew what prompted his reply. No doubt it was based on a suspicion that he could never have given form to.

"Yes; I think I have."

She started, and changed color ever so slightly. He noted it, and felt a fierce desire to catch her by the white throat and compel her to a confession which he did not doubt she could make.

"Indeed?" she murmured, recovering quickly. "May I ask the nature of it?"

He strode nearer to her and looked sternly into her eyes.

"Vitriol was the nature of it!" he said.

Her face changed, and she fell back a pace. Her first thought was that he had really discovered in some way what had taken place in the chamber that night.

Her courage almost failed her, until she remembered how the vitriol had been poured into the fireplace.

"Vitriol!" she repeated. "And what has that to do with her departure from here?"

"You know that better than I, Mildred," he said harshly. "Something tells me that it is a clue. I warn you that I shall employ the best detectives in the country to find her, and if there is anything in your connection with this matter that will not bear investigation, I warn you to beware."

She steadied herself under his eye, though her brain was in a turmoil, and answered coldly:

"You are in a strange mood to-night. I suppose, however, you are always that way nowadays. What should there be in my connection with—— Pshaw! you are absurd!"

She turned away and resumed the seat she had risen from during the conversation.

He looked at her steadily for a moment, and said:

"It will be useless for me to remain here longer. You will not help me if you can. Good night!"

"Will you not stay to supper?" she said, flashing a singular look at him. "It will seem strange if you go away without that little formality."

"No," he replied, "I could not eat with you."

Her eyes flamed under their long lashes, and her heart seemed to contract with anger and rage, but she pleaded in a low tone:

"I will not ask you to eat with me. For the sake of the servants, that they may not know how you hate me, eat under my roof. I will not eat with you."

He hesitated, and she saw her advantage.

"It is a small thing to ask, Donald. If you will stay and eat for appearance sake, I promise you I will tell you some things about Goldie that I would not otherwise tell. Won't you stay for her sake, Donald?"

He gazed sternly at her.

"I do not know your motive in urging me to remain, but I will, and will demand of you the fulfillment of your promise."

A strange smile flitted over her lips at his response, and she rose, saying:

"I will go see that you are properly served."

But when she was out of his sight and hearing her face became convulsed with a devilish passion and she hissed:

"Properly served indeed! It will be the last meal you will ever take, Donald Irwin!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

FOILED BY A WOMAN'S WIT.

Goldie had made the last effort of which she was capable when she sank fainting at the door of the little cottage.

The young woman who had stood at the door, watching her approach with wonder, cried out in dismay to see her fall helpless at her feet. She hurriedly ran with the baby and deposited it in its crib in an inner room.

Returning quickly to where Goldie lay, she lifted her in her strong arms and carried her into the cottage, murmuring words of commiseration. And when she placed her burden on a couch that stood in the room, she looked down at her and exclaimed in tones of deep admiration:

"How beautiful she is! And how young to be a widow!"

For Goldie's mourning proclaimed her that, and the wedding ring on her finger told the good woman that her guess was not wrong.

"Poor dear!" the woman went on pityingly; "she looks as if she had known a great deal of unhappiness."

She did not stand idle, however, as she made these

comments, but worked over Goldie to bring her from her swoon.

But the poor girl had borne all she could without feeling the effects of the strain, and the swoon only gave way to a stupor, which so frightened the woman that she ran to the back door of the cottage and cried in troubled tones:

"William, William, come here quickly!"

A pleasant-faced, stalwart young man threw down the axe he had been wielding in the task of felling a tree on the outskirts of the garden and ran anxiously to the house.

"What is it, Kitty?" he demanded breathlessly.

"See!" she replied, pulling him into the room where Goldie lay. "This poor lady came to the door and fell fainting there. I brought her in and revived her, only to find that she was ill like this. What shall we do?"

"Do?" he cried earnestly. "Why, I will go for the doctor at once. What a sweet face she has!"

He threw on his coat as he spoke, and was soon hastening down the road in the direction of a little village, whose church spires could be seen over the tops of the leafless trees.

He had not gone far on his errand of mercy ere he heard the rattle of a carriage behind him.

"Perhaps I can get a ride to the village," he mut-

tered as he turned and saw that the vehicle was a buggy, in which there was only one person.

The carriage was going very rapidly, however, and the driver seemed fully occupied in gazing earnestly about him.

He disregarded the signs made him by William, and was about to pass on, when suddenly he pulled up as if just aware of the presence of the other.

While he was reining in his horse, William was engaged in studying his face and general appearance, and was not very pleasingly impressed.

The face was a handsome one enough, but bore every mark of dissipation and brutality, and the clothing he wore was far from such as a self-respecting man would wish to wear.

"Beg pardon!" he said gruffly, "but have you seen anything of a young lady coming along this way?"

William started, hesitated, and then asked:

"What sort of looking lady?"

The man in the carriage, who was no other than the ruffian, Harry, saw by William's manner that he had something to communicate concerning some lady, and he did not doubt that it was Goldie.

His eyes snapped, and it instantly flashed through his ready brain that the best way to overcome the hesitation which he noticed was to ingratiate himself with this stalwart stranger.

"If you are going my way," he said, with a politeness which sat oddly on him, "get in and ride. I can tell you about the lady as we go."

The plan exactly suited William, who had no other reason for being suspicious than the rough appearance of the stranger. So he stepped into the carriage, and Harry touched the horse with the whip to start him up again.

"The truth of the matter is," he began, with a cunning that had stood him in stead in many a scrape, "that I am looking for my sister, who has left her home. I see you look wonderingly at my rough appearance. You must not judge me by that, nor must you judge her. These garments are only a disguise adopted for a proper purpose."

He used the language of a gentleman, and his manner was that of one who moved in good society; as indeed had once been the case. William was deceived very readily.

"What does your sister look like?" he asked.

"I see from your manner that you have met a stranger," Harry said quickly. "I pray Heaven it is my poor sister. Tell me! have you met a strange young lady?"

"I have, sir."

"Was she young—in the very bloom of girlhood—and yet dressed in the garb of a widow? Was she

beautiful as the morning, with golden hair, and eyes the color of wild violets? Tell me!"

He spoke earnestly and feelingly, and William replied without hesitation to such an accurate description of the stranger who lay ill in his cottage.

"I have met such a young lady," he replied; "and, in fact, it is on her account that I am now on my way to the village."

"On her account! What do you mean, my dear sir?"

"I mean that she lies ill in my cottage—the one you just passed—and that I am now on my way for a physician."

The cry of joy and wild exultation that rose to the lips of the scoundrel would have betrayed more than brotherly interest, had it escaped him. He choked it back in time, and hid his eyes, to conceal the expression that leaped into them.

"Ill!" he murmured. "I feared as much. I beg you to tell me how ill she is."

"My wife picked her up, unconscious, and took her into the cottage. She has recovered consciousness, but lies like one in a profound stupor."

It seemed as if fortune was with the wretch.

"Then she has not been able to tell you of the calamity that drove her from her happy home?" he queried, and waited eagerly for the response.

"She has not uttered one word since her eyes opened, nor before. We are ignorant of her name, even."

"Poor child!" murmured Harry with pretended solicitude. "I will tell you what I will do. I will take you to the village street, and then turn back to cheer her by my presence if she should recover consciousness. You can return with the physician."

Then, without waiting for a word of remonstrance or of suggestion from William, he struck his horse with the whip and drove rapidly into the vallage, where with many meaningless words he put him down.

"Come as quickly as you can," he cried, as he turned around and drove away with all the speed his horse was capable of.

He had calculated the chances of a scheme that had entered his brain, and was determined to make an effort to carry it out.

"I shall have ten minutes' start of them at least," he muttered, as he urged his horse on to increased speed. "Much can be done in that time."

He drew up at the gate of the cottage yard, and leaped out of the carriage almost before the wheels had ceased to turn. He knew the horse would stand without being tied, and therefore walked swiftly up the path to the cottage.

William's wife had heard the rattle of wheels, and

had hurried to the window to see if it was possible that her husband had returned so soon.

She was not prepossessed by the appearance of her visitor, but opened the door boldly and asked him what he sought.

He took off his battered hat politely, and with a smile of easy confidence, answered:

"I took your husband to the village to get a physician for my sister. Poor girl! how is she now?"

"Your sister!" repeated Kitty Morton, looking distrustfully at him.

"Don't wonder at the difference of our appearance," he said with a smile. "I will explain that to you. It is a part of her sad story. I fear she has not been able to communicate it to you."

He pushed himself past her with an appearance of earnestness that robbed his action of rudeness, and stood looing at poor Goldie's pale, passive face.

But Mrs. Morton, woman-like, was more suspicious than her husband, and did not lose her distrust of the wretch because of his glib words and assured manner.

She did not guess at his intentions, but was sturdily prepared to see that no harm came to the beautiful stranger who had fallen at her doorstep.

"My darling sister!" he cried in well-simulated tones of distress, "how it grieves me to see you in this

condition again. Ah, madam, it is not the first time the poor child has been thus.

"If I had known she was like this I might have saved your husband his journey to the village. Her mother is the only one who can rouse her from this condition. She must go home at once."

He moved to Goldie's side and had bent over her to take her in his arms, when Kitty Morton caught him by the arm, and with a strength that gave him a new respect for her, pulled him away.

"Are you out of your senses?" she cried vehemently. "It would kill her to take her away in that condition. You shall not touch her until the doctor has given permission."

The fellow shut his teeth together, and had he dared take the risk would there and then have felled her to the floor to get her out of his way.

Force, however, was totally out of the question. He must succeed by cajolery if at all, and every moment was precious.

"My dear lady," he said, earnestly, "you have little idea of what you are doing. The fact is that her very life may be at stake. For her own sake she should be taken home at once."

Sturdy Kitty Morton closed her lips firmly, and answered:

"There can be no such great haste. The doctor

will be here in a few minutes. He will be the best judge."

The scoundrel's eyes flashed. Might it be possible to use violence and escape?

Strong and self-reliant as Kitty was, she was yet but a woman, while he was a powerful man.

He glided to the door and threw it open. If the doctor's carriage was in sight force was out of the question; but if there was no sign of it, why——

He looked down the road, and a muttered curse fell from his lips. The carriage was speeding swiftly toward the cottage.

Cunning only remained to him. He would wait and find the means of getting her in his hands yet.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

"CURSES COME HOME TO ROOST."

There was a feeling in the heart of Mildred that the beginning of the end had come at last. She knew that she loved Donald, and yet there was a stronger feeling impelling her to take his life.

Something told her that as long as both he and Goldie lived, there was danger that they would come together.

If there had been time, she might have hoped to get Goldie in her power again so that she might destroy her beauty, but the threat of Donald to employ the best detectives made her fear that Goldie would be found.

Not only that, but if she were discovered now it would be in her power to direct such attention to her, Mildred, that the murder of her father might be discovered. And if that were to come to light, with the guilt of it fastened on her, the law would interpose to take her out of Goldie's way.

"I see how it all would work," she muttered. "I should be executed, and those two would come together and be happy. His death rather! Yes, he shall die!"

With this terrible determination in her heart, she

hurried to her rooms, and there brought out the casket of poisons, which she had taken with her from the city. She chose the same vial that had been used by her before, but she took not that alone.

"I will combine it with this," she muttered. "Then he will have time to go from here ere he dies!"

Her hand shook as she took out the vials of poison, but she did not relent.

She now glided down into the dining room, and gave orders to the maid who came at her summons to prepare a hasty supper for Donald.

When the maid went out, she poured out a glass of sherry, and into it dropped a small quantity of the poison from each vial.

"Why does he love her?" she hissed fiercely.

"If he had loved me, all would have been different."

Meanwhile something had occurred of which she was not yet aware, but which concerned her closely.

A few moments after departing from the sitting room one of the maids entered looking for her.

"Did you wish to see Mrs. Irwin?" Donald asked.

"Yes, sir, a gentleman is asking for her."

Donald told the girl that Mildred had gone to prepare him some supper, and she left him to seek for her mistress.

Owing to the fact that Mildred had first gone to her

room, the girl missed her at first, but learned from another maid that she was in the dining room.

Fearing that the visitor would become impatient of the long delay, the girl went to him and told him that her mistress was engaged in the dining room, where she would go at once to find her.

"I will go with you," he said; and when the girl looked at him in amazement, he added confidently:

"It will be all right."

So she led him along the hall into the great dining room, where Mildred, just finished putting away her poison vials, stood with pale face and compressed lips.

"A gentleman, Mrs. Irwin!" the maid said.

Mildred looked up with a wild start, and at sight of the visitor's face, gasped:

"You?"

It was the scoundrel, Harry. He had changed his ruffianly clothes for good ones in the height of the fashion, and to a casual observer would have passed for a gentleman.

He waited for the girl to leave the room, and then stepped hastily to the side of the table opposite Mildred.

"Yes, it is I," he said quickly.

"It is something about her—Goldie," she breathed.

"What is it?"

"She has escaped from me, and I need your help."

"Escaped! fool! how came you to let her?"

"Not on purpose, you may be sure. But never mind the details. Are you interested enough to help me get her back in my power?"

"You know I am. If she should tell what she knows I would be ruined."

"Well, you needn't worry yet. She has been in a condition that would prevent her saying a word. But the doctor says she will recover speech at any time within twenty-four hours."

"Where is she?"

"In a little cottage, not far from where I took her."

"And what do you wish me to do?"

"I wish you to go there and represent yourself as her friend. Say who you are, and when you get the chance give her this powder. It will make her pliant when she recovers consciousness; and then we can get her into our power again."

"And why do you need me?" she asked. "Why not do this yourself?"

"Because they suspect me for some reason, and will not let me be alone with her."

A singular smile flitted over Mildred's dark face. It had occurred to her that once with the sick girl, she could give her a few drops of her poison, and so end her life.

"I will do it," she said. "To-morrow morning you

shall take me to her. And you must leave me now. I have company I must attend to."

The wretch nodded his head in acquiescence and turned toward the door.

A sharp exclamation from his lips made Mildred look in that direction.

Donald stood in the doorway, such an expression on his face as left her in no doubt of the truth.

He had heard, if not all, at least enough to let him know what plot it was that she had been concocting.

"Your husband!" the man murmured, at the same time looking furtively around for some avenue of escape.

"Do not stir a step!" came sternly from the lips of Donald, and as he spoke he leveled a revolver at the head of the other.

"What does this mean?" Mildred cried with a vain attempt at braving it out.

"It means that by the merest accident I have discovered enough to let me know that Goldie has been the victim of a foul plot, in which this scoundrel is mixed up. It means that I shall hand you both over to the law to be dealt with without mercy."

The man cowered, showing how poor a spirit he was when real danger confronted him.

"Look here," he cried, "I will tell you everything if you will let up on me. No harm has come to the lady."

"The law!" cried Mildred, frightened by the thought of what might happen if ever she fell into the clutches of the law.

"Yes, vile woman," was the stern response, "the law shall deal with you as you deserve."

She staggered back and caught the table for support.

For a moment neither of the men saw that she had in fact lost consciousness. But as her hold upon the table relaxed and she was about to sink to the floor, her companion in crime jumped to her side and caught her in his arms.

His first thought was to throw water in her face; but a swift glance at the table showed him a glass of wine poured out, and he caught it up and poured its contents down her throat.

Donald strode to her side and took her from the other, who relinquished her willingly enough, saying:

"I will go bring a servant."

"You will leave this room at your peril!" Donald answered sternly. "I can ring for a servant."

He did so as he spoke, and when a maid came he gave her no time for comment, but said:

"Your mistress has swooned. We have given her a glass of wine that stood on the table. Attend to her, and, if necessary, have her taken to her room."

"Yes, sir."

"I shall not remain until she recovers, but will go away on important business at once. Come, sir."

His tone was curt and threatening, and the wretch did not hesitate to obey him at once, though all the while he was pondering how he could escape from one who could hand him over to justice.

"You will take me at once to where your victim lies." Donald said in his implacable way. "And if you try to escape from me I will shoot you as I would a dog!"

"I'm not going to try to escape," the man said, sullenly.

Some minutes were consumed in getting their coats and hats, and then Donald, suddenly remembering that he had sent his conveyance away, was about to order a carriage from the stable, when Harry exclaimed with an eagerness he had some difficulty in repressing:

"I have a buggy at the door. It is at your service. I can take you in it right to the door of the cottage."

Donald looked sternly at him.

"Perhaps your offer covers some device; but never mind! the risk of treachery is all yours."

"I mean you no treachery," he answered, in the sullen way that had come upon him.

"Come, then!"

CHAPTER XL.

HAPPINESS AT LAST.

The stupor into which Mildred had fallen was so prolonged, that after fifteen minutes of unavailing effort to revive her, the housekeeper sent for a physician.

It was half an hour when the doctor came, and it was some minutes ere the strenuous measures adopted by him had any result.

Then Mildred opened her eyes in a dazed way and looked about her, as if unconscious of the lapse of time since she swooned.

"Where—where is he?" was her first question, as she strove to rise in the bed.

"Your husband, ma'am, has been gone half an hour at least," was the response that greeted her.

"Do you mean that I have been ill that long?" she demanded weakly, her black eyes fixed on the girl's face.

"Yes, ma'am."

Mildred wondered what it was that made her feel so languid and powerless to move.

"What happened?" she demanded; and then, with a sudden recollection, cried eagerly:—"My husband! Did he not eat the supper that was prepared for him?"

"No, ma'am. He went away at once with the gentleman who was here."

"He—he did not even drink the glass of wine I—I poured out for him?" she demanded.

"Oh, no, ma'am. That was given to you, when you swooned."

The girl never forgot the awful look that shot into the eyes of her mistress at those terrible words.

"It was given to me! Oh, my God!" she screamed, trying vainly to rise in bed. "Did—did he give it to me?"

"I think not. I think it was the other gentleman; but I don't know."

"How—how long ago was it?" Mildred panted, the beads of cold perspiration rolling from her forehead.

"More than half an hour."

"Too late!—oh, Heaven be merciful—too late!" she wailed. "Doctor, there was poison in that wine. I put it there for him to drink, because he would not love me. Doctor, I am dying!"

"Tell me the poison!" murmured the horrified physician. "There may be an antidote."

"There is none. Oh, I am dying as my poor father died from the same poison. Papa, papa—forgive me! Heaven have mercy! They will be happy and I shall dwell in eternal torment. Oh, Heaven, have mercy!"

For some minutes after leaving the house Donald addressed no word to his companion; but presently he said sternly:

"I owe you no mercy; but if you will tell me truly where Mrs. Selden is, and how you came to be engaged in this nefarious enterprise, I will let you go free."

The wretch did not believe Donald, judging him by his own base nature; but he saw no reason now for concealing the part Mildred had played, nor of endeavoring to conceal the present whereabouts of Goldie.

He, therefore, told Donald all that he knew of Mildred's acts and intentions, and froze the blood of his listener by a faithful description of the terrible scene in Goldie's apartments when Mildred was bent on destroying her beauty with vitriol.

He also described to Donald where the cottage was in which Goldie lay ill, so that there could be no difficulty in finding it.

If he had been more honorable he would have believed the words of Donald, but it was impossible for him to imagine that the latter would forgive him and let him go free.

He consequently talked on and on, but watched all the while through the darkness of the way for an opportunity to leap suddenly from the carriage and escape.

He could not see just where he would alight when he leaped, but he was determined to take the chance.

So as he talked he loosened the robe that was folded over his limbs, and suddenly threw it off and leaped out.

There was a crashing of underbrush, a wild cry and then silence.

And, although Donald drew up at once and called to his late companion, there was no response.

"The foolish wretch!" murmured Donald, under his breath; "he might have trusted me. Now he may find his way on foot."

And he never knew that the scoundrel had that hour met a deserved fate by leaping from the carriage over the very edge of a precipice, which skirted the road.

He never knew by what a terrible and strange coincidence the two enemies of Goldie had gone out of life together.

He did learn afterward of the tragic and awful end of the woman who bore his name, but it was a knowledge which he ever kept sedulously from Goldie.

That night he pursued his journey toward his darling untroubled by any of the evil happenings which were to make his life in the future peaceful and happy.

He reached the cottage shortly after midnight, and was received at first with doubt and suspicion. But,

when he told enough of Goldie's story to enable her kind friends to understand, he was welcomed cordially.

His horse was taken to the little stable that belonged to the cottage, and he was given a comfortable chair in the same room with Goldie so that he might rest and watch at the same time.

"The doctor is sure she will recover consciousness by morning," kind Kitty Morton said to Donald.

So he sat in the easy-chair and found more peacefulness than had come to him in many days.

He did not know why he felt so calm and undisturbed; but afterward when he knew that Mildred had passed away with her sins on her soul, he said his peace was from Heaven to let him know that Goldie would be his in time.

The morning was far advanced when Goldie opened her eyes to recognize what was about her; and the first face she saw was that of Donald.

A cry of joy broke from her lips, and she murmured eagerly:

"Oh, Donald, I am so glad!"

Knowing her terrible experience he understood her cry of joy.

He took the little hand in his and pressed his lips to it, murmuring:

"I know everything, Goldie. You are safe now, and

ever shall be. And something tells me that there is happiness awaiting us both in this world."

It was not right away that they knew that freedom had come to them by the death of Mildred; for it was not at once that he could be found by the messengers sent after him.

But he was found in time to be present when his erring wife was buried; and when her awful story was told to him, he paid large sums of money to those who knew it, to induce them to forever keep it a profound secret from the world.

He and Goldie were not wedded at once, but waited a year ere they were joined together before the altar, as both were already certain they had long since been united in the sight of Heaven.

Indeed Goldie always insisted that they had been intended for each other from the moment of birth; for she could not otherwise comprehend why they should have fallen in love so completely at first sight.

THE END.

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